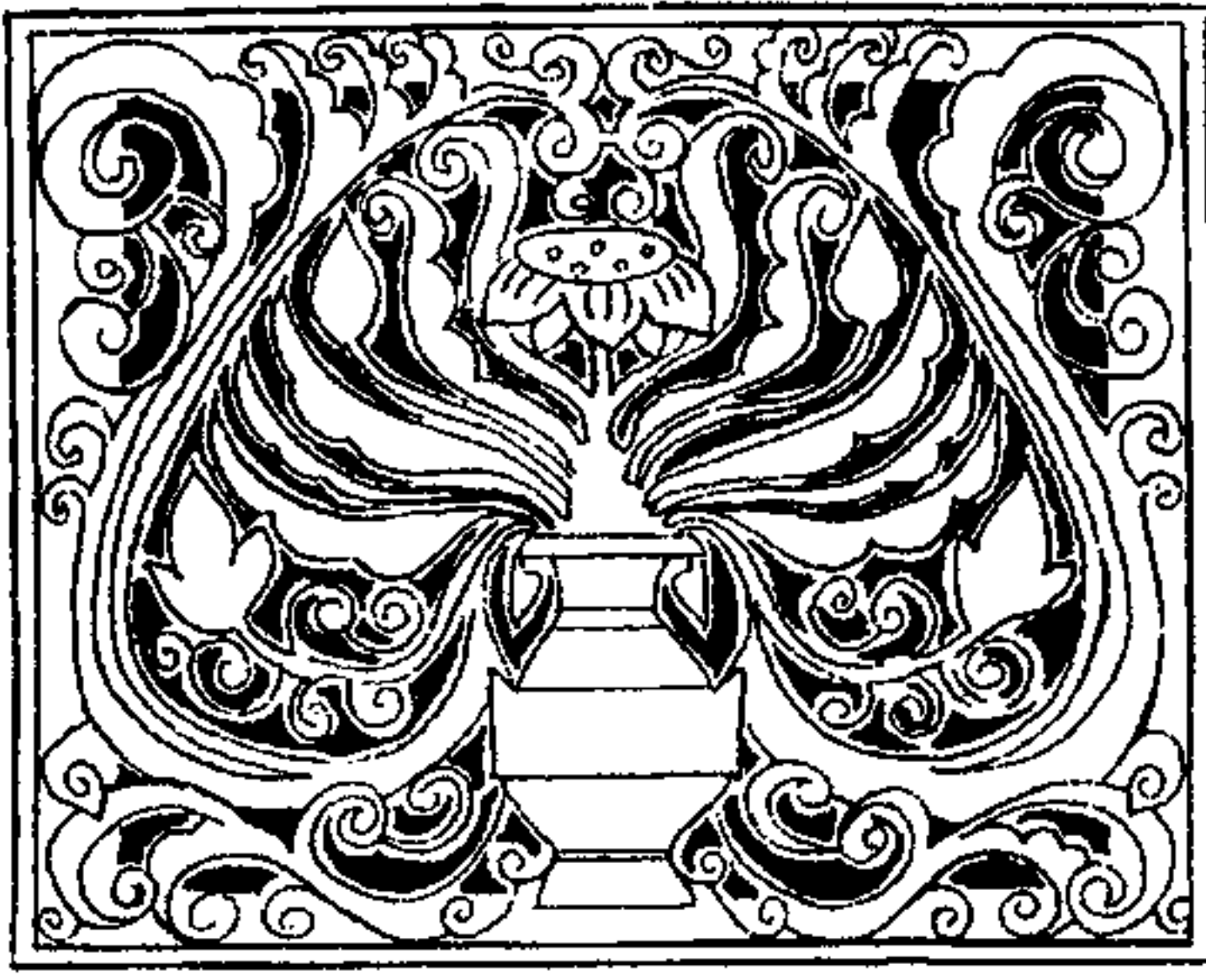




PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*A Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

APRIL 2000

CONTENTS

Vedic Prayers	193	The Message of Guru Nanak	219
		<i>Dr. Jasjit Singh Walia</i>	
Editorial: Should We Worry?	194		
Images of India's Past	200	Ramakrishna Math's Millennium Gift to Devotees	223
On Vedanta and Christianity etc ...	201	Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta-V	224
<i>Swami Ranganathananda</i>		<i>Dr. Alan Hunter</i>	
Environment in the Past Millennium	207	A Mathematician's View of Dvaita Philosophy	227
<i>Mohan Dadlani</i>		<i>Dr. V. M. Korwar</i>	
Something Impossible!	210	A Humble Farmer Turns Great Poet	228
<i>Udbodhan March 1917</i>		<i>Prabuddha Bharata, February 1911</i>	
Religion and Life: Swami Bhutesh- anandaji's Answers to Questions	211	What I Learned from Nature	230
<i>Smt. Manju Nandi Mazumdar</i>		<i>'Hiranyagarbha'</i>	
Cybertechnology: Boon or Bane? ...	213	Stories That Inspire: Differences	231
<i>Tom Mahon</i>			
The World Deified	216	Book Reviews	233
<i>Br. Swarupachaitanya</i>		News and Reports	240

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 105

APRIL 2000

No. 4

VEDIC PRAYERS

पृथु रथो दक्षिणाया अयो-
ज्यैनं देवासो अमृतासो अस्युः।
कृष्णादुदस्थादर्या विहाया-
श्चिकित्सन्ती मानुषाय क्षयाय॥
—Rg Veda, 1.123.1

The chariot of the gracious (*dakṣiṇā*) Uṣā is ready. The immortal gods have entered this chariot. Uṣā comes out of the darkness. She is the adorable one who comes in order to remove the diseases (ignorance) of human beings.

पूर्वा विवस्माद् भुवनादबोधि
जयन्ती वाजं बृहती सनुत्री।
उच्चा व्यख्यद्युवतिः पुनर्भूरोषा
अगन् प्रथमा पूर्वहूतौ॥
—Rg Veda, 1.123.2

Uṣā awakens before all living beings arise. She is the giver of food, she is great, and is the giver of happiness. She awakens every-day (since time immemorial) but she is ever-young. Listening to our prayers, Uṣā, who stays above, is the first to come to us.

यदद्य भागं विभजासि नृभ्य
उषो देवि मर्त्यत्रा सुनोति।
देवो नो अत्र सविता दसूना
अनागसो वोचति सूर्याय॥
—Rg Veda, 1.123.3

O highborn Uṣā! You are the protector of human beings. Grant today unto human beings the brilliance of yours. Inspired by you, may the benevolent Savitā give his light to the sun. May the sun by his rising declare us to be sinless.

Should We Worry?

EDITORIAL

Distressing Events in Life

It was a beautiful family. Father, mother and son lived a happy life. The father had retired recently. The son had passed his engineering examination with distinction and had a nice job. All was going on well. It was an enviable family indeed. But everything went awry one day when fate gave a startling blow. While returning from his workplace one evening, the son met with an accident and lost his leg. The shock told upon the aged father, and he suffered a massive heart attack. Sympathizers helped for some days as usual. You can't expect people to help forever. The poor lady was left with a bruised, one-legged son and an ailing husband. Monetary resources too slowly began to dwindle. People suggested court cases but the lady was diffident. It was a harrowing time for the lady, who saw nothing bright in store for her. The family had reached a dead end, as it were. What else will the lady do but worry? What happened to this family we shall discuss later.

The second story is that of a scientist. He was a researcher; but unfortunately for him, he was naive enough to be cheated everywhere. He had put a lot of time and effort in a project, successfully completed it, and had prepared a wonderful paper. But his boss had sat on it for a long time; this poor man was frustrated. With the passing of time there was always the risk of someone else's succeeding in this field, and the theme itself becoming fossilized. He was extremely worried—so much so that there was a fear of mental breakdown too. What happened to him will be discussed later on.

The third story is that of an entrepreneur. He was running a small factory, and the product he manufactured had very little rivalry in the market. His product was selling well. All

of a sudden there appeared a new firm on the horizon. Tremendous competition ensued. He failed to convince his buyers to buy his product. Finally, a company that had run for years had to be wound up. He was completely broke. Isn't it natural for this gentleman to worry? What happened to him we shall tell later.

The Problem of Worry

It's not unnatural for such events to occur in society: we can witness such problems occurring all around us. Many families suffer sudden reverses. Financial crunches, passing away of dear ones, disease, losing jobs, failing in exams, disappointments—there are countless problems that people suffer from. What do all these lead to? The most common result is worry. Worry is one of the most common and popular engagements of the especially modern human mind. The mind plays and replays the same tape of problems for no reason. God has given us a mind, but this mind gives us unending trouble, and of all the troubles worry is the worst. How many instances aren't there to portray the ill-effects of worrying? How many people aren't there who are ill just because of worrying? Hair has turned grey overnight; skin has got wrinkled within days; stomach ulcers are too usual, deaths aren't uncommon—all because of worrying. Scores of crimes, suicides, addictions, and social evils are owing to worrying. Youth vanishes quickly, old age creeps in eagerly, all light in life disappears forthwith—all owing to worrying. The popular saying is, 'Fire burns quickly while worry burns slowly.' In the January 2000 number of *Reader's Digest* there is an article on worrying where certain beautiful phrases have been used to describe worry, like 'long-distance worry,' 'borrowing trouble from the future,'

etc. Worry is a unique disease.

Worry can take various shapes and forms. We worry ourselves out over many small and big things. Children generally are supposed to be free from this disease, but they aren't. Modern education has brought them too under the sphere of worry. Even toddlers are worried over 'competitive exams' because if they don't perform well, they will not get admitted to good schools, and their parents will scold them. School-going children are worried about exams, homework, competition, etc. The burden of studies always hangs over them (as do their heavy knapsacks!). As years go by, the burden only increases, and students are more and more worried about results, about getting through in exams, about bettering their performance, etc. Parents and teachers feed fuel to students' worry by comparing them with others. Children must live up to the standards their parents set up; or else there is constant friction, scolding, and as a result, worry. Children may not be interested in the goals parents set up for them. As Camilin Cornell writes in the February 2000 *Reader's Digest*, 'too often parents choose activities they wanted to try and didn't have the opportunity.' This leads to conflicts. Another problem is, higher education calls for competence and excellence. Today's world will not accept the mediocre and so students have to exert their utmost in order to achieve success. To gain entrance into famed institutions to do important courses is not given to everyone. This leads to tremendous worry and suffering in students.

After years of struggle and worry, if some students get through with 'flying colours' and succeed in becoming engineers, doctors, etc, a new life should begin for them. Unfortunately, they begin to walk a tightrope. The world is not all that easy and simple as these babes in the wood imagine. The bubgle sounds for a long-drawn battle of nerves. The success they have achieved is only a stepping stone to the citadel of worry. To succeed in each profession needs skill and sweating

blood today. Failures, losses, cutthroat competition, cunning, dishonesty, and a host of other evils threaten the aspirants to success to death. Worries, therefore, won't end.

There are, then, the other causes of worry. Parents desire, as we hinted, that their children should become great scientists or doctors or engineers or pilots. When their children don't listen, they are immensely worried. To parents, all other children appear to progress well along the path of life but their own son or daughter appears lagging way behind. This bothers them a lot. Next, vices. There are several vices which invite the younger generation today. The youth are easily susceptible to evil influences of society and parents have a hard time in seeing their children safely through the educational battlefield. Marriage, jobs, disease, financial problems—the causes of worry are endless. Past mistakes can drill holes in the mind of a sensitive person. Anxieties over future issues can cause great harm. Then there are many small worries: the train is late, the flight is delayed due to fog, family members were to reach home by noon but are late, and the like.

Doctors worry about their patients and themselves, lawyers about their clients and cases, business persons about their businesses, housewives about their families, teachers about their students—whichever area we peep into, there is the problem of worry. Very few are the people who can say firmly that they are free from worry.

Hints to Stop Worrying

This is the state of affairs today in society. Society is growing more and more complex. To all intents, a dark undercurrent of treachery seems to control all social movement today. With the present trend of a super-speed lifestyle, with the ever-increasing population, with the law of survival of the cleverest, life has become intensely complex and base. Social life was simple earlier and there was the joy of living. There was competition no doubt, but it wasn't as horrible as now. With all the complex network of mod-

ernism, with everything counted in terms of dollars, with all the newer gadgets and technological wonders, there is tougher competition and, consequently, smaller minds. However, the less spoken about the evils around, the better. But what do all these lead to? Worry. The whole thing has been summarized by Sri Ramakrishna beautifully in a single sentence. He says, 'Man's sufferings and worries spring only from his persistent thought that he is the doer.'¹

How to overcome worry? There is a beautiful book, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, which was a great success in yester-years. There were other helps too. There are numerous suggestions given by stress management experts these days. Many small worries can be sorted out by rational thinking. If the bus is late, let's say, 'It happens.' By worrying, we can't bring the bus any earlier. This is about smaller worries. What about others? Experts give many tips. Of them, one is to forget. Suppose we have lost a case or money or, worse, a dear one; we are extremely worried about it. In order to forget this worry, experts suggest that we should engage in some other activity. To engage ourselves in some different pursuit will make us forget the problem for some time, they say. The second method suggested is to think logically. Most of our worries are related to future events. 'What if' is a big question which bothers many of us. Experts suggest that we should rationalize and be prepared for the worst. Suppose we fail: what then? Let's fail. Let the worst happen. There is always a second attempt. Thus, rational thinking will solve many of our problems, say experts. The third method they suggest is to face the brute. There is a swelling somewhere in the body and we are worried that it might be cancer. We are terribly afraid to see the doctor because he may declare that we are cancer pa-

tients. How do we solve this problem? Worrying in this case only worsens the situation. We must consult physicians and follow their advice. Even if it is the inevitable, we shall have to face it one day or the other. And medicine can indeed cure many types of cancer—the earlier the detection, the better.

The Role of Religion

When all is said and done, superficial solutions won't do lasting good. You may forget a worry, but it's there all right. The root has to be taken care of. And there are situations which are beyond our control. The above suggestions work only where things are possible to handle. There are problems which are beyond us. There appear certain hurdles in life which are apparently impossible to surmount. What are we to do then? Neither rationalizing, nor accepting, nor engaging ourselves in some other activity will help. It's natural for us in such situations to be extremely worried. How do we stop worrying in such situations?

That is where religion steps in. Does religion mean only going to temples and churches, doing some perfunctory worship, following certain ritual practices, eating *prasad*, and then forgetting it all? If religion cannot help us succeed in our day-to-day struggle, it is not worth its name. Swami Vivekananda said, 'Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid.'² How will religion help us overcome the suffering caused by worry?

Whenever there is a problem, there are two ways open before us: one is negative and the other, positive. The negative is the path of worrying, and the other is that of prayer. You can go on worrying that your son is unruly,

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1981), p. 142. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]

2. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 5, pp. 81-2.

your daughter is disobedient, you have a disease, you are facing a financial crunch, and so on. But will the situation improve by worrying? Unfortunately not. The situation only worsens. Worry weakens the mind instead of strengthening it. Worry has never been able to provide help. Therefore we should resort to the other beautiful, positive path: prayer. Now, whether or not we should pray for worldly ends is a different question. That was why Swami Vivekananda said that religion should help a person in whatever situation he is. When we are in difficulty, let us seek His help; there's nothing wrong in it. Only let us not forget Him in good times.

The Glory of Prayer

Is prayer scientific? Providentially for us, very recently even the medical profession has somewhat 'officially' declared that prayer can cure several non-curable diseases. 'A new American study claims that illness can be cured by the power of prayer, even if patients do not know people are praying for them. William Harris, of St Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, organized 12 months of tests on patients at the hospital's coronary care centre. ... As a precaution, patients and doctors on the unit were not told of the experiment. ... The 466 patients who were prayed for had a significantly better outcome than the 524 patients who received no prayers,' says *The Times of India* (16 November 1999). Prayer is becoming a 'scientific' method of solving problems. Those very 'scientists' who would decry faith in God, prayer, etc are now great promoters of the path of prayer.

What is the reason that should we pray? First, we aren't alone here, left to be buffeted by the rain and wind of the world. We aren't lonely boats on a stormy sea. The one thing we should know is that there is a merciful God who cares for us. This is fundamental to peace, happiness and prosperity. We have a God who is both in and around us, caring, protecting, helping, and saving us always. Again, we human beings are pint-sized creatures. In spite of our boast that we are strong

people and that we don't simply care for anything, we *are* helpless. Self-confidence and faith in oneself aren't being questioned here. The point is, there are many, many areas where our prowess can't come to our aid. In such situations, one thing helps, and that is prayer. All we need is to seek His help. This seeking is called prayer. Second, to imagine that science or the present world will have answers for everything under the sun is yet another superstition. What science can't solve can be solved by other means.

How should we pray? Many of us think that religion, prayer, etc are for monastics and educated people only; it's not for us. What's the reason? We don't know how to pray; and will God listen to people like us? Now, there may be diverse theories about prayer, there may be many books about how to pray, and there may be various prayer techniques. But God loves simplicity, and He is beyond all our theories and techniques. A simple heart's yearning is what He understands—thousands of saints have attested to this truth. Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of a child's calling her father, 'The grace of God falls alike on all His children, learned and illiterate—whoever longs for Him. The father has the same love for all his children. Suppose a father has five children. One calls him "Bābā," some "Bā," and some "Pā." These last cannot pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those who address him as "Bābā" more than those who call him "Pā"? The father knows that these last are simply too young to say "Bābā" correctly.'³

Sri Ramakrishna was perhaps the greatest propounder of the path of prayer in modern times. Page after page of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* speaks of the glory of prayer. 'God is the Kalpataru, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. You will certainly get whatever you ask of Him,' he assures repeatedly.⁴ Why should God listen to our prayers? 'God is our Inner

3. *Gospel*, p. 407.

4. *Gospel*, p. 481.

Controller; He will certainly listen to our prayer if it is sincere.⁵ Since God is our inner Controller, it is He who decides and controls everything. So, resorting to Him should be the natural way for us. Sri Ramakrishna gives a wonderful example: 'The kitten depends completely on its mother. It accepts whatever its mother does for it. The kitten only cries, "Mew, mew!" It doesn't know what to do or where to go.' He adds, 'Devotees of this class give God the power of attorney and thus become free of all worry.'⁶

What about Past Karma?

There is the age-old idea that we suffer because of our past actions (*karma-phala*). 'As we sow, so we reap,' is a popular saying. When someone has a disease or when someone is suffering, we usually say that the person is suffering only because of his bad actions in the past: either past lives, or this life itself. This makes things more complex. If we hold on to this causal chain, there is no respite at all. Are we then mere cogs in the universal machine, helplessly beaten at every step? Luckily for us, Sri Ramakrishna declared for the first time that circumstances aren't that bad. A visitor asked him, 'But the law of karma exists, doesn't it?' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'That also is true. Good produces good, and bad produces bad.' The visitor asked again, 'Then what is the way for us? We shall have to reap the result of our past karma, shall we not?' Ramakrishna replied, 'That may be so. But it is different with the devotees of God.'⁷ We see a similar discussion taking place in another place in the *Gospel*. There Sri Ramakrishna assures a devotee: 'The effect of karma wears away if one takes refuge in God.' But the devotee appeared puzzled. He asked, 'Can God violate law?' To this Sri Ramakrishna retorted strongly, 'What do you mean? He is the Lord of all. He can do everything. He who has made the law can also

change it.'⁸ Holy Mother Sarada Devi too repeatedly assures that the effects of past actions can be lessened and overcome by repeating the name of God. She says, 'By japa and austerity is cut asunder the bondage of karma (past action).'⁹ So let's not stoop with worry and walk with the burden of karma on our back. Let's walk straight and with joy; we are the children of God. He *will* protect us. We have a majestic way to overcome misery and suffering. And that way is prayer.

Let's have faith: in God, in His words, and in His saving power. That's our only requirement. We keep all our fortune in some bank without any worry, just because they give a few printed papers signed by somebody! So also we should believe in the footprints of saints and sages and in their immortal words. Faith is a great source of strength. In the Bible we come across numerous instances of the glory of faith: 'Thy faith has made thee whole' (*Matthew*, 9:22). Through faith in God impossible things have been achieved and it's beyond this article to go into details about them. Prayer gives immense strength to the mind. It heals wounds and soothes the soul. But we must be cautious not to presume that things will happen according to our wishes—we enter a temple, pray to God for a car, and come out to find a brand new one standing at the door. Such things don't happen. Great saints have repeatedly said, 'Pray and wait, pray and wait.' The effect of prayer too will not be according to our whims and fancies. God knows best. He will remove suffering in His own way. Prayer, therefore, is not bargaining.

Whenever there is a problem before us, whenever there is a difficulty, whenever there is cause for worry, let us forcibly make our mind pray and not worry. The mind's tendency is to brood over failures, difficulties,

5. *Gospel*, p. 670.

6. *Gospel*, p. 843.

7. *Gospel*, pp. 250-1.

8. *Gospel*, p. 817.

9. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1969), p. 406.

problems, etc. We should train it to pray instead.

There's another difficulty. We can't say when exactly there will be suffering for us. You are sitting in your office, talking to your friends with great joy. Suddenly you receive a phone call which changes your life. All joy is gone. You were not at all prepared for this shock. So, misery and worry do not come with forewarning. What should we do then?

Making a Habit of Prayer

That's the reason why all religions teach us to pray everyday at dawn and dusk and if possible, throughout the day. Preparedness is what saves us from many disasters. Through constant prayer, the mind gains such strength that it becomes a shock absorber rather than succumbing to shocks. And through constant prayer, we become more and more dependent on God rather than on our own puny prowess. But the problem with us is, we don't pray everyday. We generally have a lot of time to do numerous other things but not prayer. And when there is some difficulty, we blame God. Let's make it a point to pray everyday that God may protect us, fill our lives with peace and joy, and fill others' lives too with bliss and peace, that we may be free from worries and tensions, that God help us in difficulty, and so on. There are numerous prayers designed by saints to help us. We may repeat them. Chanting *stotras*, mantras, etc aren't mere rituals or customs. They are very powerful; they can even guide us away from the misery of the world.

By cultivating a habit of prayer, then, we are always ready to face difficulties with even-mindedness. Difficulties too will be less, at most like pin-pricks. And we shall also understand that difficulties aren't exactly difficulties but tests from God. God's tests are wonderful. His tests are only to help us, to make us more and more faithful. His tests are to help us return to our source. All our suffering is because we have walked away from the

source and have been cut off from the source of grace and power. Once we tend to return towards that source, there is supreme peace and joy. And that's exactly the goal of life.

We began with three incidents. In the first, the family had appeared to reach its dead end with the father ill and the son lame. The mother was strong. Instead of worrying, she went on praying to God. Her only prayer was, 'O Lord, show me the way.' He did. Months after the accident, when everything seemed lost, a letter came from the lady's younger sister. She, a single woman, had been transferred to the city where this family lived. Would the elder permit the younger to stay at her house? The lady gladly agreed; and that was the beginning of change. Seeing the family's condition, the younger one rendered all help and guidance and in a year or two, the family was once again back to its earlier glory.

The researcher about whom we talked was no doubt frustrated. Since he was a scientist, it was difficult for him to believe in things like prayer, God, etc. But repeated blows told him that he should hold on to something higher than his own intellect. His intellect itself was on the brink of disaster—continued worry can't keep any ordinary mind sane for long. Finally, with great hesitation, he began to pray. He slowly got the conviction that he was doing something positive at last, after years of struggle. He prayed and prayed. In a year, he had some good news to tell everyone—his boss seemed to appreciate him one day. That was the beginning of a great change.

In the third story, the entrepreneur didn't sit down and worry. He was a devotee. He prayed to God to show him the way. After a few months of difficulty, someone suggested to him that he start a new venture. He was hesitant because it was new to him altogether, but he tried. Within months he was successful. And today he is flourishing. □

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Greatest Sacrifice in History

Vikramaditya ascended the throne of Mewar after his step-brother, Ratan Singh, died. This stupid fellow was an incarnation of vice. He invited the sworn enemy of the kingdom, Vanavir, to live with him. Vanavir was his relative, all right; but he was a villain too. When the fool Vikramaditya showed him the red carpet to his kingdom, Vanavir showed him the red carpet to heaven: he murdered Vikramaditya in cold blood! To erase the clan completely, Vanavir also wanted to kill Uday Singh, Vikramaditya's young son of six years. Panna, who was the au pair of the Sisodiya family, had looked after Uday since his birth with great love, and he lived with her. She came to know one night that Vanavir was on his way to assassinate Uday. She secretly sent the boy away in a box and placed her own son on Uday's bed. Vanavir came, enquired where Uday was and when Panna showed the bed, he brutally killed Panna's son. There was no time to weep. Panna took her dead son, went to the river, and performed obsequies. She left the kingdom with Uday. How Panna managed to contact several nobles who were against the tyranny of Vanavir, how she brought up Uday Singh like a king, and how she got him married to the daughter of a king, are all amazing stories. In time, Uday avenged his father's murder: he captured Mewar, killed Vanavir, and was enthroned. However, his only concern was in what way he could repay Panna for all her sacrifice. Such loyalty and dedication to the empire are unheard of (cf. *The Mughul Empire*, ed. R.C. Mazumdar, p. 331).

A Gigantic Statue

No cranes, no modern engineers, no technological knowhow. But in 983 CE, Chamunda Raya of Ganga dynasty erected a 57-foot-tall statue of Gomata (also Gomateśvara) on a stony hill in Shravana Belagola, Karnataka. This massive statue, which proudly stands even today, was carved out of a single block of gneiss 'and justly described as being unrivalled...for daring conception and gigantic dimensions' says Smith in his *Oxford History of India* (p.199).

India's Influence on Korea

'The year 374 A. D. is specially memorable. In this year, the first Indian Ācārya came to Korea. ... It is not possible to ascertain the Sanskrit name of the Indian Ācārya. In Korea he is popularly known as Ahdo. Ten years after the advent of Ācārya Ahdo, in the first year of King Chimryoowang, the second Indian Ācārya came to Korea. His name was Mallānanda. He came to the other Korean kingdom of Paikje. After his arrival, the Dharma echoed in the kingdom of Paikje. ... We have the names of six pilgrims from Korea who came and studied in India. On their return, they preached the Dharma in China and Korea. The names of these pilgrim teachers should be enshrined in Indian history: Hecho, Heyup, Heryoon, Hyungak, Euijung, Hyunjo. It is not possible to say how many other travellers came' (*India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*, pp. 341, 343).

On Vedanta and Christianity, etc

(From a Question & Answer Session at Chicago, 1982)

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, currently President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, conducted, during one of his annual three-week lecture tours of the USA, this illuminating Question & Answer Session at the request of Swami Bhasyananda, the then head of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago. In the Feb. and March issues of the Prabuddha Bharata, two parts of the account, appeared under the heads of, (I) On Conversion, Real Teachers, etc and (II) On Reincarnation. In this issue, we publish, another part.

Question: *Today you gave a talk at the University of Chicago on the very famous Parliament of Religions of 1893. What influence does it have on the other religions, especially Christianity?*

Swamiji: Since Swami Vivekananda's visit to USA and England and preaching the broad philosophy of Vedanta, sensitive minds in the Christian religion have been deeply affected by the broader conception of religion presented by him in the Parliament. Many people do not like anything narrow or parochial, anything that makes for dogmatism, anything that finally leads to violence; they do not also like to be atheists as well. To such people, Vedanta came as a tremendous message of hope. Here one can be spiritual and yet respect all religions; one can be happy with inter-religious relationships. This kind of influence of Vedanta has spread among numerous people. We have seen people who had turned atheists or had left Christian denominations after coming to Vedanta. They returned to their denomination and pursued Christianity further and further, because Vedanta does not tell them, 'Change your religion,' but inspires them saying, 'Your religion is beautiful.' Unless one *wants* to change over to something like Buddhism or Vedanta, we do not suggest such a change, but tell, for example, a Christian to be a better Christian. Many people have told us that they understood Christianity better through the help of Vedanta. I have seen that some people have written books or articles also relating to this.

In this way, a broadening of the Christian religion and a deepening of the Christian awareness have taken place. That is the work that Vedanta does in India with the various Hindu sects and in other countries with other religious people. India also is getting a deepening of religion through Vedanta. Otherwise, mostly it was a conventional, formal, popular religion. There is no real spiritual religion at all in the hearts of many people. But Vedanta brings to them spiritual awareness and a broad human attitude. This is the work of Vedanta in the modern age, for which alone Swami Vivekananda came to this part of the world. Many good Christians today are experiencing this broadening, and the effect is much more felt in India. Christianity in India is experiencing a tremendous broadening by coming in touch not only with Vedanta, but also with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. They invite us to address Christian seminaries in India. I have addressed several seminaries. One such was very significant. That was in December 1969, on my return to India after eighteen months of lecture tour of USA and South America. I was invited to address a meeting of the Roman Catholic priests held in St Joseph Church of Vazukkad, Thiruvananthapuram, in Kerala. I asked them what subject they wanted me to speak on and, strangely and most happily, they said, 'Please speak to us on Catholicism as viewed in the light of Sri Ramakrishna.' We could not imagine this kind of a subject being given to a non-Christian like me

to speak on 15 to 20 years earlier. There is a tremendous change coming. So, I went there, and they welcomed me, full of love and respect, and introduced me to the audience. The first half-an-hour I spoke about the beauties of the Catholic religion—how many saints it has produced, what wonderful services it has done to poor and suffering people, and all its other beauties and achievements. The second half-an-hour I spoke about the failures of the Catholic religion, its persecution, its violence, very often its political chicanery, so many irreligious evils which it has done for the last several centuries. I added, 'Today we need a new Christianity; we need a new Catholicism. That new religion will come through the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna will help you develop a pure Catholicism, more in tune with the original spirit of Jesus, peaceful and fully endowed with humane feelings for all religions.' When I finished the speech, the vice-principal got up and thanked me. One sentence of that thanking, I wish to convey to you. He said, 'For the last one hour, we all felt that one of our ancient Church Fathers was talking to us about our Catholic religion.' This is the new trend in Indian Christianity. Many of them deeply appreciate my 1953 Christmas Eve speech in Calcutta on *The Christ We Adore*, published by the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta. I am glad to tell you that this kind of happy inter-religious relationships of 'give and take' have now set in. Many Hindus see in the Catholic religion many beautiful aspects, especially its spirit of service and dedication, and its many lovable saints. So, in this way, we ask our people to take the best from the Christian religion, its spirituality, practical efficiency, and spirit of service. Similarly in Islam there are broad attitudes, equality between man and man, no high and low. Let there be a 'give and take,' and this is what Vedanta is doing in all parts of the world. It does not have its own views as a sect, or a set of dogmas to propagate, but only a strengthening and unifying philosophy and spirituality.

Question: You have just been talking about Vedanta. In India there are so many schools and so many traditions of Vedanta. We are not quite sure what you mean. Please explain to us what is unique about Vedanta.

Swamiji: Vedanta as understood today through Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and as generally understood throughout the ages, covers the entire spectrum of spiritual life. Broadly speaking, the path of bhakti or devotion to the personal God, and the path of philosophical reflection and realization through the path of jnana, both are one and the same in the end. In the beginning there are differences in methods. Vedanta includes both of them, so that God is defined as impersonal-cum-personal God, that is Brahman, the ultimate Reality, of the nature of *sat*, Truth, *cit*, Consciousness, and *ananda*, Bliss. The one impersonal-personal Reality is also called Siva and Sakti, Brahman and Sakti; that is the totality of the Divine. From that Divine has come out this universe; in That the universe exists; and into That the universe merges at the end of a cosmic cycle. If you are concerned with the path of bhakti, you worship the personal aspect of the Divine. If you are concerned with the path of knowledge, devote yourself to the impersonal aspect of the Divine. Both the Impersonal and the Personal are one. With this knowledge, you can follow whatever path you choose. The majority of people in India are devotees. The Advaita jnanis are only a few. Therefore, all these are part and parcel of the *sanatana dharma* or Hindu religion. Vedanta includes the path of bhakti, the path of jnana, the path of karma, and the path of rajayoga or meditation—the four paths that are usually mentioned. A scientific classification of religion will be like this. Christianity is a path of bhakti, except one single saint, namely the German saint Eckhart, who went a little towards the path of jnana, towards the impersonal aspect of the Divine, for which he was threatened with prosecution by the Catholic Church, but fortunately he died be-

fore it was done. But now, there is also the path of jnana, coming up here and there in Christianity. In the main, it is a path of bhakti. Most of Islam also is a path of bhakti except for a few Sufi mystics. Buddhism is a path of bhakti as well as jnana. In India, Vaishnavism, Saivism, etc, are all paths of bhakti. So in this way, you can classify religion scientifically according to human taste and temperament. That is what Vedanta has done. Till now we had only this scientific conception.

Now, various ideas have come to the Hindu religion, Christian religion, and Muslim religion—these are accidental. But religion, when you study psychologically, deals with this human approach. That is understood in Vedanta. Therefore, all these are part and parcel of Vedanta. That is how Vedanta is understood. However, for the last two or three centuries, people generally meant by Vedanta only the Advaita Vedanta of the jnana path leading to the impersonal Brahman. That is in the distorting Christian missionary literature, where India and Hinduism are distorted in many ways, and where you will find that whenever you speak of Vedanta, it is the jnana path, the transcendental path, the path of the impersonal Brahman. That is not correct. All religions are included in Vedanta, all aspects of spiritual development. That is the correct meaning of Vedanta.

Vedanta literally means the Upanishads; *Veda-anta*—the end of the Vedas, or the essence of the Vedas, that is, the Upanishads. There you have jnana and bhakti; later on, karma was elaborated in the *Gita*, and dhyana or rajayoga also came along with it in various disciplines. All these put together constitute Vedanta. Today it is the only living philosophy in India. We had Samkhya, Vaiseshika, and other systems of thought, but all of them were absorbed into Vedanta in later centuries. The most predominant philosophy and spirituality of India is understood as Vedanta. When you study carefully, Buddhism also turns out to be Vedanta. Jainism also becomes Vedanta in certain respects. India does not

mind a religion being atheistic. The word atheism really means that one does not believe in a creator God. Many aspects of Vedanta do not believe in a creator God. Vedanta itself believes that God has produced the universe out of himself. It is an evolution from the Divine; the whole universe is divine accordingly. And so, these religions are part and parcel of Vedanta itself. The Upanishads form the basis for all these wonderful developments that took place thereafter.

I asked Dr Suzuki, the famous Zen master of Japan, who addressed a public meeting in our Delhi Ramakrishna Mission centre in the 1950s, 'What is the relationship between Mahayana Buddhism, which is in China and Japan, and Adi Sankaracharya's Advaita?' He said, 'It is just the same—only a little difference of stress here and there—it is just the same.' I asked the same question to a great Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar of the Hinayana or Southern School; Dr Malalashekhare, who passed away sometime ago. He also said that Hinayana Buddhism and the path of knowledge of Vedanta are one and the same. So, the Upanishads became the reservoir out of which various religions developed. Some of them started as tribal and popular religions; they became elevated by the philosophical touch of the Upanishads and the *Gita*. That is what has happened to various religions in India; the touch of the Upanishads is there in every aspect of spiritual life in India. Some of the American writers have said, 'You cannot understand Buddhism without understanding the Upanishads.' In fact, E.J. Urvik, a famous British intellectual, wrote a book, *The Message of Plato*, in which he says, 'You cannot understand Plato and Socrates without studying the Upanishads.' These Upanishads have influenced the wide spectrum of spiritual thought of India tremendously.

Question: *Could you please tell us about your Mission's views on caste and the place of women?*

Swamiji: At present, caste is an obsolete social institution whose death-knell has been

sounded by every spiritual and political teacher of modern India. The Indian Constitution also has broken its back, so that today's democracy and caste cannot go together, and democracy is taking great roots in India. This caste system became obnoxious because of the undemocratic tendencies that developed in it in the course of centuries. Originally it was just like a guild. The carpenters form a guild, or the barbers form a guild—professional guilds, labour or trade guilds. Later on came this genetic succession and then came certain special privileges of certain groups over the others. These evil aspects came later, but they are still there. They did some service at some time to protect the Hindu society from external encroachments. Today, the situation has changed. Therefore, the Indian mind has reacted to the new situation by trying to remove this caste system entirely. India will create a free egalitarian social order which is completely democratic. In most of the provinces in India, there is no caste feeling at all. But in the interior villages, where education has not spread, you will still find this caste exclusiveness and superiority complex. Surely its days are numbered, because today's democracy, education, and democratic political functioning—these things will not allow this caste system to continue. Secondly, the Government of India's effort is geared to bringing up the lower and disadvantaged classes by spending more money on their education and on their economic development. Once they develop economically, caste loses all basis at once. Because of poverty some were low; and when they become well developed, this thing will not happen. So, caste today is a past story; perhaps it is lingering somewhere; but its death is sure to come within the next few decades.

Now about India's women. Throughout India's early history, there has been no masculine prejudice against women. In the earliest period of Indian history, women and men were absolutely equal. Consider the *R̥g Veda*, the earliest religious scripture in the world.

There were women poets, fighters, and also great workers. That is how women have been portrayed in the *R̥g Veda*. In the Upanishads, you find a beautiful description—the equality of men and women, how the divine Person divided himself into two equal halves, one became man, and the other became woman. Therefore, the one is incomplete without the other. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* [1.4.3], there is this wonderful statement: 'Sa imam evātmānam dvedhāpātayat, tataḥ patiś-ca patnī cābhavatām; tasmāt idam ardha-bhāgam iva svaḥ, iti ha smāha yājñavalkyaḥ, He parted this very body into two. From that came husband and wife. Therefore, said Yajnavalkya, this (body) is one half of oneself, like one of the two halves of a split pea.'

That is the Indian concept of woman. We don't call the wife the 'better half'. The idea of calling a woman 'better half' was introduced in the West to soften the biblical statement that woman was made by God from a rib of man, a dispensable rib! India also developed the concept of God as Mother, the womanly aspect of the Divine. That is a tremendous development from the very beginning in India's history, God as Mother. God as Father is there; God as Mother also is there; again God as the genderless Brahman, the Absolute is there. So, when you have God as Mother, women's status goes up automatically from the spiritual point of view. Spiritually speaking, women had achieved great heights in the past ages. In the Upanishads, there is a glowing description of it. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, we find that there was a big philosophical congress in the court of King Janaka in Mithila (the present Bihar). Leading philosophers had come from various parts of India. Among them was a great woman, Vachaknavi Gargi by name. She challenged Yajnavalkya, who was an outstanding philosopher at that time, in debate; and the Upanishad, while narrating this story, says (3.8.1): 'Atha ha vācaknavy-uvāca, brāhmaṇā bhagavantāḥ, hanta, aham imam dvau praśnau prakṣyāmi; tau cen-me vakṣyati, na vai jātu

yuṣmākaṁ imāṁ kaścīd brahmodyaiṁ jeteti. Pṛccha gārgi iti, Then the daughter of Vachaknu said, "Revered brahmanas, I shall ask him two questions. Should he answer me those, none of you can ever beat him in describing Brahman". "Ask, O Gargi."

Yajnavalkya replied to all her questions. After hearing that, Gargi got up and addressed the gathering thus (3.8.12): '*Sā hovāca, brāhmaṇā bhagavantaḥ, tad eva balu manyed-hvam yad asīnāṁ namaskāreṇa mucyedhvam; na vai jātu yuṣmākaṁ imāṁ kaścīd brahmodyaiṁ jeteti. Tato ha vācaknavy-upararāma*, She said, "Revered brahmanas, you should consider yourselves fortunate if you can get off from him through salutations. Never shall any of you beat him in describing Brahman." Then the daughter of Vachaknu kept silent.'

No mention of her gender is there, because it was accepted. She had every right to argue. You can see that in the Vedic period women occupied a high position, especially spiritually. Later on, when foreign invaders began to come from about the fourth century CE onwards, women's position began to deteriorate, not because their men became wicked, but women faced insecurity on account of invasions and needed some forms for safety and protection. In any insecure society, women are the worst sufferers. They need more protection. That was what happened to India. In today's America, you find the truth of this: more men and less women come to attend the functions held in our Vedanta Societies in the evenings. So, in the India of that situation, certain rules began to be made. First thing was early marriage. In the beginning, boys and girls were both equally educated. They both had to undergo the sacred thread ceremony, which you find today only among the Parsis, the Zoroastrians in India. Among them, both boys and girls undergo this sacred thread ceremony. The only difference is, the Hindu sacred thread is worn from above the left shoulder, across the chest, and hangs down and touches the right hip, going round the back. Among the Parsis,

it is tied in the waist. A certain ancient Smṛiti contains this verse: '*Purākalpe ca nārīṇāṁ mounjī vandanaṁ iṣyate; adhyāpanaṁ ca vedānāṁ gāyatrī vācanaṁ tathā*, In ancient times, women were invested with the sacred thread and were educated in the Vedas, and were initiated into the Gayatri mantra.'

It is a beautiful utterance. There was absolute equality between man and woman there. Later on, as I said, when insecurity came, the first suffering that women were subjected to was in the field of education. It became shorter and shorter because security was needed. Early marriage came into picture so that husband and wife lived together, and she had security. This becomes worse by the time we come to the 18th century, when thorough political instability was there. But you will see the truth of it as to how change came as soon as stability came. When India became free, every door was open for our women, and nobody opposed it. There is no feminist movement in India, one of the most beautiful things you will see. In England, women had to fight through their suffragette movement and break a few glass panes of buildings before they got the power, in about 1919, to vote for parliament elections. In India, no such thing was there; even in 1916, the All-India National Congress president was a famous poetess, Mrs Sarojini Naidu. Similarly, all through, so many years later, you will find so many women in every sphere of life; nobody opposed it. But, unless education comes, they cannot come up at all. Gradually, education began to spread in the modern period once again. Nobody opposes it, no male person is opposing the building up of women's freedom in India. The problem is only the sheer necessity to deal with millions and millions of people and the limitation of resources. Today, education of girls is going up very fast. They are coming into Parliaments and State Assemblies; they are in the judiciary; they are principals of even boys' colleges. No restrictions are there, and men support them and help them to come up in that way. As such,

we have no need to develop any feminists' movement in India. There has been a decline in women's power only because of the feudal heritage of the past few centuries. Today, India is going away from that feudal heritage, and developing the modern democratic heritage. Education has spread very much. In fact, our girls are doing much better often in college and school than boys. They get excellent marks everywhere. That is the position in India today.

Question: In that line, in the Western tradition of spirituality, we have several women as gurus; for example, St Theresa of Spain. Do you find that there is that recognition and freedom for women to take spiritual leadership in the mystical elements of Vedanta?

Swamiji: In Vedanta, it is absolute, there is no question at all. Vedanta does not recognize any gender in the Atman—in the true self of man or woman. When you grow spiritually, you grow beyond gender awareness in that genderless Atman, which is the true Self of all. That is the position of Vedanta with respect to this particular idea. In Christianity, there are great saints like St Theresa of Avila, whose autobiography is very famous. I enjoyed reading it, especially its one sentence: 'A sad nun is a bad nun; O Lord, save us from sullen saints.'

But, in the Catholic Church, there was the subordination of women saints to men priests. St Theresa was under the control of St John of the Cross; Mother Mary had no place in the Catholic Church till about 7th century CE, and after 1000 years, when the Protestant movement came, Mother Mary was again re-

moved from that high position. That was a sad development that took place. In Western theology, women are always considered secondary. A young male priest can control and guide a senior woman priest. In Buddhism also, this difficulty came. Buddha was not willing to allow the monastic life for women. But when Ananda, his personal attendant, intervened on behalf of women, Buddha agreed with one condition that they would be under the guidance of monks.

Swami Vivekananda, when he started the Ramakrishna Order, made this clear: he was not going to continue that discrimination. Women will be perfectly free to run their own affairs. No man will dominate them in their monastic order. So, we have a monastic order for men, the Ramakrishna Math, and another one for women, the Sarada Math, where women are absolutely free. They have their own board of trustees, their own president, etc. So, today's Vedantic monasticism has this particular quality—absolute equality between man and woman, and the absence of gender bias. This was not possible in the past few centuries of foreign invasions and social insecurity, and therefore we had difficulty at that time. Today, we can have a Mother Theresa, living in the free cultural atmosphere of India and being highly respected by everybody, not because she is a woman, but because she is holy and has compassion. Therefore, no personal gender distinctions come in the culture of sainthood. Everyone can be a saint—man or woman. That is the position today; and this will be influencing the whole world as well, in course of time.

To be continued.

Ramakrishna Visits America!

When Swami Saradananda showed Sri Ramakrishna's photograph to Mrs Wheeler, his hostess, she almost shouted, 'Oh, Swami! It's the same face!' 'What do you mean?' asked Swami Saradananda. She told him that long ago in her youth, before she was married, she had had a vision of a Hindu whose face was the same she now saw in the photograph. 'It was Sri Ramakrishna, but I did not know it until now. I was so impressed and charmed by the vision at the time, that I remembered the face very distinctly. I have been going about here and there ever since—whenever I heard that a Hindu had come to America—but I was always disappointed. At last I see that it was Ramakrishna.'

SPECIAL MILLENNIUM ARTICLE: ENVIRONMENT

Environment in the Past Millennium

MOHAN DADLANI

Mr Dadlani, who is a marine terminal safety specialist in the state of California, USA, presents a brief and informative survey of how we have maltreated God's gifts to us during the past. He also suggests methods to improve the situation. Graphs in the article are taken from Global Warming Projections for the New Millennium [Web site: <http://www.edf.org/programs/grap/y3k/>].

Scriptures say that God created five elements, namely space, fire, earth, water and air, for sustaining living beings. During the past millennium, human beings have caused harm to all the five elements owing to excessive development and overpopulation, thereby bringing about environmental degradation. This survey draws from numerous articles and attempts to provide some food for thought so that necessary mitigation measures may be taken in a timely manner.

Population Growth

According to the United Nations, world population exceeded 6 billion persons towards the end of the second millennium. In contrast, the earth's population was only 300 million at the end of the first millennium. The approximate world population growth has been as follows:

Year 1250 AD...	400 million
Year 1500 AD...	1 1/2 billion
Year 1800 AD...	1 billion
Year 1927 AD...	2 billion
Year 1960 AD...	3 billion
Year 1974 AD...	4 billion
Year 1987 AD...	5 billion
Year 1999 AD...	6 billion

The United Nations predicts that the world's population is most likely to grow from the present 6 billion to 8.9 billion by the year 2050.

Population growth is considered to be the root cause of most of the world's environ-

mental problems. Every being needs food, water and shelter for survival. One of the grave concerns now has been that the growing world population would inevitably outstrip the earth of its supply of natural resources which sustain humankind. While a majority of people in industrialized countries can procure an adequate supply of food and water, a significant proportion of humanity lives in dire poverty in underdeveloped and developing nations. This large chunk face starvation and experience acute shortage of clean drinking water. This unsustainable progression of extremes of wealth and poverty threatens the very stability of society while harming global environment.

Population growth plays a vital role in a wide variety of environmental problems, including climate change, deforestation, and air and water pollution. The connection is logical, for all things being equal, a larger population consumes a greater quantity of resources and produces more wastes than a smaller one. However, the precise impact of population growth, as compared with other factors like economic growth, technological changes, etc, has often been a matter of debate.

One of the important side-effects of population boom is change in lifestyle. More and more people, for the sake of economic and social benefits, prefer to live in cities and

big towns rather than in rural areas. The migration of great numbers of people to urban areas results in longer commutes, frequent trips to visit relatives and friends, life in congested, uninhabitable apartments, noise and air pollution, etc. Some of these factors create stressful and unhygienic living conditions, resulting in crime, excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs, breaking families, divorces, and other socio-economic problems. Urban areas also generate large volumes of waste, particularly plastics, metal cans, and toxic wastes that are difficult to dispose of.

Effects of Development on Environment

Nature has an efficient system to clean the five elements and purge them of harmful substances. The earth has sustained life for millions of years. Land, forests, oceans, and the atmosphere provide us with food, shelter, medicines, etc. They purify our air and water, stabilize the earth's climate, and protect us from the sun's harmful rays. However, we human beings, in the pursuit of creature comforts, have exploited natural resources in a thoughtless manner, resulting in harsh and often irreversible damage to the environment and on critical resources. Some areas of concern are as follows:

1. Water Resources: Exploitation of depletable ground-water supplies endangers food production and other human systems. Pollution of rivers, lakes, and ground water further limits the supply of drinking water.

2. Oceans: Destructive pressure on oceans is severe, particularly in the coastal regions which produce most of the world's fish. Rivers carrying eroded soil into the seas also carry industrial, municipal, agricultural, and livestock waste—some of it toxic. More than half the world's coral reefs are potentially threatened by human activity.

3. Soil: Loss of soil productivity, which

is causing extensive land abandonment, is a widespread by-product of current practices in agriculture and animal husbandry. Some 20% of the world's susceptible drylands are affected by human-induced soil degradation.

4. Forests: In a day we lose a forest the size of New York City! Such is the amount of destruction being caused. In the past decade alone, 154 million hectares of tropical forest have been destroyed, thanks to human greed.

5. Atmosphere: The Northern Hemisphere has been warmer in the 20th century than at any time in the past millennium, and the 1990s has been the warmest decade of the century. The study by Dr Michael E. Mann and Dr Raymond S. Bradley of the University of Massachusetts, and Dr Malcolm K. Hughes of the University of Arizona, appeared in the *Geophysical Research Letters*. Due to the build-up of greenhouse gases, the average temperature may increase in the next millennium.

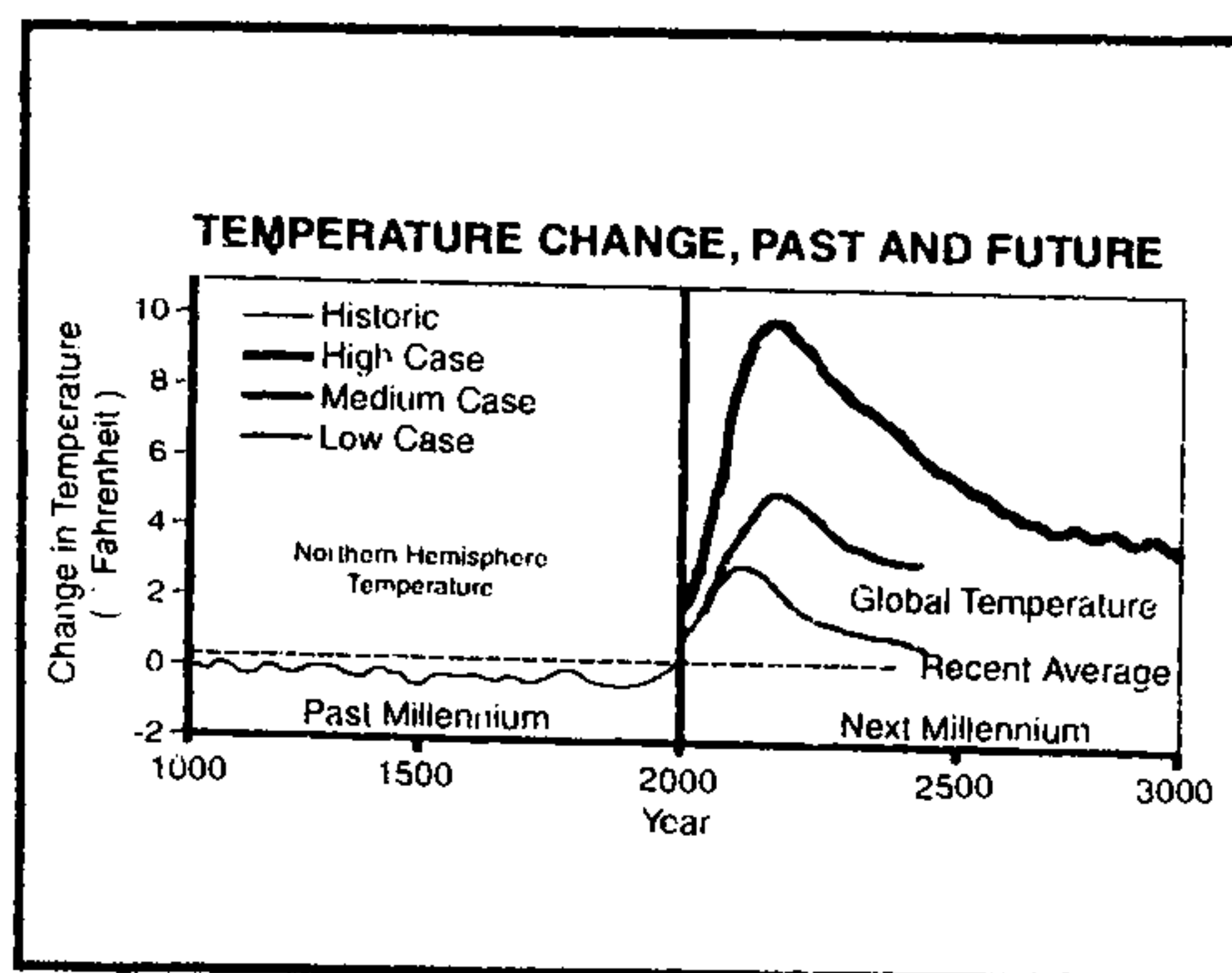


Fig. 1

6. Carbon Dioxide Concentration: Due to industrialization, and burning of coal, oil, wood and natural gas, the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere has been climbing. Nearly 1 billion people are inhaling polluted air which is causing them severe health problems.

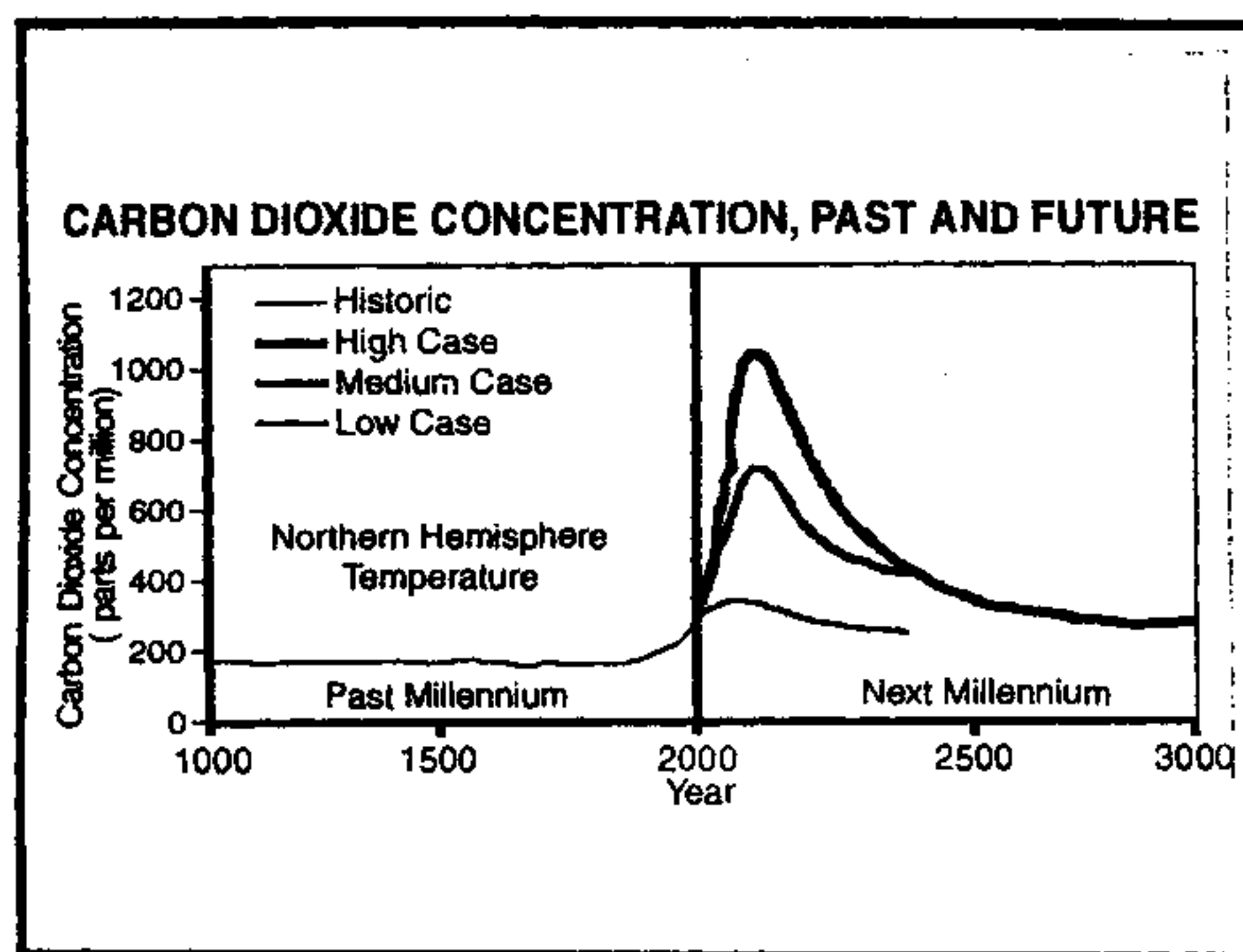


Fig. 2

7. Sea Level Rise: Warmer temperatures promote sea level rise through increased melting of land-based ice and by causing ocean water to expand. Over the last 1000 years, sea level has risen at an average rate of about 1 inch per century. Over the last century or two, sea level has been rising at a faster rate, 4 to 10 inches per century, resulting in flooding and submersion of coastal plains and islands around the world.

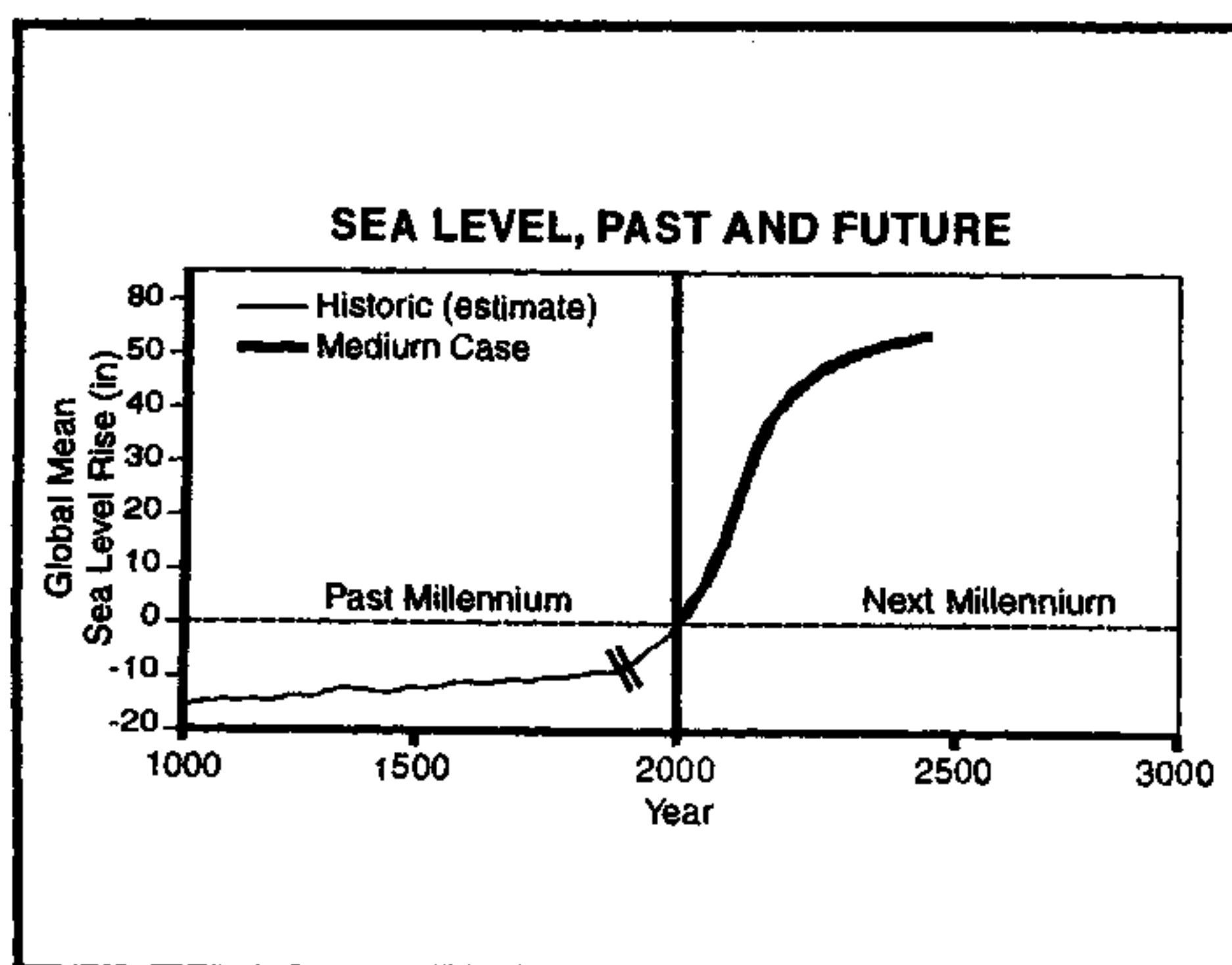


Fig. 3

Need of a New Ethic

We are attacking the environment with a multitude of high-powered, lethal weapons: pollution, deforestation, global warming, unregulated development, over-consumption of resources, and destruction of habitat, to name a few. If future generations are to re-

member us more with gratitude than sorrow, we must achieve a balance between growth and technology. We must learn to respect God's gift of pure water, air, and earth, and refrain from dumping toxic substances which pollute the environment. Humankind has a very short span to take remedial actions so as to avert the threats that confront living beings.

A new ethic is required—a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the earth. We must recognize the earth's limited capacity to provide for us. We must recognize its fragility. We must no longer allow it to be ravaged. This ethic must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant leaders, reluctant governments and reluctant people themselves to effect the needed changes. □

The Earth is Getting Warmer and Dirtier!

It's bad news! The Himalayas have very little snowfall these days. No glaciers imply no water in the future. Scientists warn that during the last century, the earth's temperature has risen between 0.7 to 1.4 degrees C—an alarming 30% increase from earlier projections! They believe that the reason for warming is man-made pollution—higher levels of carbon dioxide and other 'greenhouse' gases which trap the sun's heat like an insulating blanket. Those living in large cities like Calcutta, Delhi, Bangalore, etc can see this 'insulating blanket' especially during their evening walks along the crowded streets. They will, to their horror, see only smoke everywhere. The lungs have to search for oxygen desperately. The result? Health problems, specially those related to lungs, are commonplace nowadays—this is at the individual level. At the collective level, vegetation—our lifeline—is suffering immensely. Our past was such. Should we leave a legacy of pollution for future generations? Let's resolve not to spoil our environment, ie, ourselves, anymore!

Something Impossible!

We present a free English rendering of a remarkable article by Sri Mayamoy Mitra, published in Udbodhan 83 years ago (in its March 1917 issue).

The famous shrine of Kedarnath closes for pilgrims in the month of Kartik (in November) and reopens in the month of Vaishakh (in April). Pilgrims thin out with the advent of winter. Having lived in this snowy kingdom of Shiva for as long as six months, the chief priest and attendants are eager to return home. So that day, after regular worship, the temple was finally closed. There is also a belief that during the six months of winter, gods take over the worship of Lord Kedarnath and human beings don't have the opportunity of seeing the Lord.

It was afternoon. A monk came to the temple having walked a long distance along the mountainous track. He saw the temple closed and requested the priest to open it just for once. That of course couldn't be. But the monk went on repeating his request. In spite of incessant requests, the priest told him flatly that according to the tradition, the temple couldn't be opened until April next year.

The monk was pained at not having seen the Lord. He decided not to return until he had the *darshan* of Kedarnath. He decided to stay somewhere on the verandah of the temple. The priest tried to convince the monk in many ways to give up such a nonsensical resolve. 'It would be impossible,' he said, 'to live on this mountain in such bone-chilling weather; you will die.' The monk replied that he would be happy to die rather than going away without worshipping Lord Shiva. Unable to convince the monk, the priest and the others left the place. Soon the place became desolate and it was dark all around. The lonely monk sat down, pained about his misfortune. A few minutes later, he heard footsteps from the other side of the temple. He saw a smiling sannyasin, with ashes on his

forehead and arms, coming towards him. The sannyasin enquired, 'Swamiji, who are you waiting for at such an hour?' The monk narrated to the newcomer his story. The sannyasin appeared compassionate. He said, 'Come on, let's somehow pass this chilly night by lighting a fire (*dhuni*).'

The sannyasin's behaviour was so simple and attractive that our monk was moved. Both became friends soon. The sannyasin asked sometime later, 'Which game can you play?' The monk replied, 'I can manage to play chess.' The newcomer brought out a chess board and pawns from his bag. Soon both became immersed in the game.

It was dawn. The early rays of the sun lit up the snow peaks around. The sannyasin told the monk, 'This round has almost come to an end; I shall return after my morning duties; shall we stop the game for now?' Saying this, the sannyasin put back the board and pawns into his bag and went away.

A few minutes later, the chief priest and attendants came to the temple and opened the temple door. Seeing this, the surprised but happy monk told the priest, 'Yesterday afternoon, in spite of my repeated requests, you went away locking up the temple. You said firmly that you can't break the tradition. But I see you have returned early morning today, opened the door, and have broken your own rule! I don't understand the meaning of your actions.' The priest appeared stunned. 'What did you say? Yesterday? We are returning for the first time after six months! Really, were you here all these six months?'

Later on, when the weeping monk told them about the sannyasin and the chess game, they were all astonished. □

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

Can a householder live in isolation in his own house?

Yes, you can. Solitary life is possible even in a crowd like a marketplace, provided the mind is closed to everything around. But in such a state of mind you will not be able to perform your household chores. Can you work when you are ill or after death? Always bear in mind that death has you by the hair: *grhīta iva keśeṣu mṛtyunā dharmam ācaret.*

Prayers do not bear results. Why? How should we pray?

You should first think of the way you are praying. Some people say, 'If there is a God, let him come and stand before me.' Somebody prays, 'O God, cure my illness.' Yet another prays, 'O God, send rains.' Someone else prays for the destruction of his enemy. Yet another prays for peace of mind. Thus there are varieties of prayers. We pray but God does not seem to listen to our prayers. Soon the desire to pray cools down. So we should know how to pray. The first law we should accept is, just as there is happiness in life, there is sorrow also. We must accept sorrow too and should not be scared of it. But as soon as we are confronted by misery, we begin to blame God. Learn to accept things as they come. However, it is also true that in the householder's life it is difficult to face realities all that boldly. Suppose someone is ailing; he prays, 'O God, please end this miserable life.' When the end comes, he cries out, 'Why, I

didn't really mean it!' This is the case with most of us. To pray to God also we require maturity. We should always pray from the heart, and the prayer should be such that it aims at our complete well-being.

Pray from the depths of your heart. See that prayer comes from the innermost core of your heart. Pray for spiritual well-being only. Doubts as to whether your prayer will be answered or not will not do. Have firm faith in God and pray to him with a longing heart. And know that he has his own methods and ways. It is not that as soon as you prayed, he will shower all that you wished for on you. Pray with the conviction that God listens to you; pray with the intention of bringing your own as well as others' well-being; pray with the faith that God will always do the right thing. Only then can you understand the grace of God; or only then will God listen to your prayers.

Is God partial? There are references to common doubts in scriptures, like, 'Is God benevolent to some and not to others?' But God is evenly disposed to everyone, though he may appear favourable towards his sincere devotee. Know that he who accepts God's authority and grows in love for him will never ask anything for himself. Why so? Because he knows that God is compassionate; he will bestow his grace as he deems fit. By seeking favours from God people will become like beggars begging charities from everyone. That is why I said that we need

maturity to pray also. A clear conception has to be there in our mind, that God is beyond our judgement and that it is impossible for us to comprehend his ways. How can one whose faith in God is yet to grow, expect that God will fulfil all his prayers?

Listen to a story. A poor widow had a cow as her only source of income. She was a devotee of a high order. Since the cow was all that she had, she would tend the cow with great care and was deeply concerned about its welfare. God came to her house one day in the guise of a brahmin guest. The poor devotee did her utmost to look after him with great care. Pleased with her services, the guest blessed her in this manner before going, 'May this cow die.'

We may be surprised at this strange blessing. Why should God divest the poor woman of her cow, we may think. God knows best. Perhaps he thought that the mind of his dear devotee remained restless on account of her excessive attachment to the cow. She was not able to concentrate fully on him too. This cow was becoming a hindrance to her enjoying supreme bliss. So the compassionate Lord removed the last obstacle from her path. There is another story, an exactly opposite one. The Lord went to a rich man's house in disguise. The rich man did not treat the guest well. While leaving the house, God blessed him, 'May you acquire more wealth.' Perhaps the rich man thought that he had received the blessing which he was seeking always.

Remember how Kunti prayed. She said, 'O God, in my happiness I forget you and remember you only in distress. So bless me with an endless stream of distress so that I may remember you all the time.' He whose mind is pure has pure ideas only. To such a person, God's real nature will be revealed soon. Bear this in mind and you will not be troubled with doubts. To achieve this end,

you must pray intensely. What else do you need when you come to know that God alone is real and all else is unreal? So pray in this way: 'O Lord, I do not want riches; I want you and you alone.' Once you know God, you cannot have any other need at all. You will then understand that God, the emperor of all boon-givers, has given away himself to you. Just before the Kurukshetra war, both Arjuna and Duryodhana went to Sri Krishna to seek his help. Finding Krishna asleep, the arrogant Duryodhana sat near his head, while the devoted Arjuna sat at his feet. When Krishna opened his eyes, he naturally saw Arjuna first. Arjuna asked for Krishna's help to win the battle and so did Duryodhana. Krishna told Duryodhana that since Arjuna was the first to communicate his appeal, he would fulfil that first and then only listen to him (Duryodhana). He further said that assistance could be provided in two ways: either he by himself or by his invincible *nārāyaṇī* army. To whichever side he went, that party would have him only and nothing else: he would neither fight actively nor would he equip himself with any weapon. The other party would have the strong army. Arjuna said, 'Krishna, I want only you.' Duryodhana readily opted for the *nārāyaṇī* troops. The final outcome of the war was the defeat of the Kauravas and the victory of the Pandavas. He who is with God, rather he with whom God is ever present, has absolutely nothing to fear.

Finally, which is greater—*yoga* or *bhoga*? Between God and the world, which is more precious? Many people come to me and say, 'Maharaj, my mind is extremely restless. How to attain peace?' I say that there is only one way: give up desires. As soon as you give up desires, you will attain peace.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

Cybertechnology: Boon or Bane?

TOM MAHON

Tom Mahon, who is from the United States, is the author of the popular book Changed Bodies: People, Power and Paradox in Silicon Valley. In this article, he discusses the abuse and usage of the cyber age. This excellent article is a gift from AHIMSA.

Any technology has both beneficial and threatening sides. The greater issue before us is how to nudge cybertechnology towards boon and away from bane. I think this is probably the greatest issue confronting us right now.

I had an English teacher once who said that whenever you confront a big issue, start with the words involved. So I looked up the etymologies of both *cyber* and *technology*. *Cyber* appeared in modern usage in the 1940s when MIT professor Norbert Wiener borrowed it from the classical Greek, where a *cybernaut* meant a helmsman or ship's navigator. *Technology* comes from *techne*, meaning anything of human design or artifice. If you ask your stockbroker about technology stocks, he will tell you about Intel, Microsoft, and IBM, but in its literal sense, technology refers to anything of human design. Pottery is a technology, and probably the greatest technology is one we take for granted, language.

So cybertechnology contains both these concepts, navigation and ingenuity. The question is whether we steer our ingenuity or it steers us. Since we are talking about the Greeks, they had a much truer appreciation of both these concepts. They felt that humans should navigate their ingenuity, and had an entirely different take on science and technology. To them, science and technology were not ends in themselves, but means to ends. You did science to know the truth. You did technology to make the beautiful and to do good. Science and technology were means to beauty, truth, and goodness, in other words, God. We have taken science and technology,

and for complex reasons, made them into ends in themselves. So, while the Greeks, to speak broadly, navigated their technology, we have come to let our technology navigate us.

Greek playwright-philosophers such as Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Euripides worked in very small theatres, yet produced a body of literature which we still read today because of its profound insights into the human soul. We have without doubt the greatest communications technology ever assembled, yet we fill it with blather. It is as though we have nothing important to say to one another, so we communicate nonsense. The Greeks wrote immortal plays, and we blather on about meaningless, ephemeral news.

The classical pursuit of beauty, truth, and goodness has become out-of-date. If you were to show up in Silicon Valley or at MIT and say you were looking for these qualities, you would be laughed off the premises. So the Greeks not only gave us the frameworks for science and technology, but also gave us the user manuals in the form of stories to help us navigate through these. These stories have of course become so much part of our culture that we no longer remember their original purpose. I am sure you have all seen Disney's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* at one time or another. Disney took the story from Goethe, who in turn had taken it from the Greeks. Disney's version involves Mickey Mouse as apprentice to a magis or magician, who leaves early one day, after which Mickey puts on the sorcerer's hat and begins to practise using his book of incantations. Soon he has turned a

broom into a cyborg, a machine that will do his bidding. The broom begins doing his work for him, taking water from the well to the cistern, which is soon overflowing and flooding the room. Mickey, who now freed from work has fallen asleep, is awakened but is helpless against the army of diligent brooms, and is only saved by the reappearance of the sorcerer, who knows how to set things right.

This children's cartoon is perhaps one of the most ancient stories in terms of our current technological situation. With every great capability comes a commensurate responsibility. I find it ironic that the Disney cartoon, which was part of his larger *Fantasia*, came out at the same time that we were busy with the Manhattan Project, in which we see a clear case of great capability with little regard for responsibility.

The Greeks also left us the story of Daedalus and Icarus, the father-son team who built the labyrinth to contain the Minotaur. Their labyrinth was so good that they themselves couldn't find the way out. So Daedalus made them both wings out of feathers and wax, warning his son not to fly too high lest the sun melt the wax, nor too low lest the waves catch and drown him. Icarus, being young and heedless, ignored the middle path, flew too high, and died when the wax melted and he fell into the sea.

These wonderful stories from classical Greece are of great help to us in dealing with science and technology, if we choose to heed them. The first story teaches us that with every increase in capability comes an increase in responsibility, the second that whenever we employ technology it is best to follow the middle path or golden mean. The golden mean was itself translated into the children's story, 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', about a girl who wanted neither too much nor too little of anything. She wanted everything to be 'just right'. This is in fact a wonderful retelling of the Daedalus-Icarus story, and of other stories about the value of moderation

which appear in many cultures. So the Greeks, who gave us so much of the framework of science and technology, also gave us user manuals in the form of wonderful stories which teach us to balance capability with responsibility and to follow the middle path.

Now there is another strand in the fabric I am discussing. There were two cultures that contributed greatly to our culture, not just that of the Greeks. The Jews also left us an important piece, the golden rule, counselling us to treat others as we would have them treat us. The first century rabbi, Jesus, summarized this rule as 'love one another.' So I think these three golden nuggets from antiquity deserve our reconsideration. Huston Smith, I believe, actually coined the phrase 'wisdom tradition', and these are certainly pillars of that tradition. The Greek exhortation to 'know thyself' and pursue the golden mean, along with the Judaic golden rule, to love another, are essential to our culture.

The question is, what do these ancient rules say to us today as we confront our powerful technologies, which seem to have become ends in themselves rather than means to ends? It would be nice, of course, if our institutions had an epiphany and realized that indeed they should be following these venerable rules in a technological pursuit of beauty, truth, and goodness. But I think this is unlikely. I don't think our institutions have the capability, stamina, or insight to do so. So to whom does the responsibility fall? It falls to us.

If we look back over the last 400 years, however, there is reason for optimism. I can discern four revolutions, roughly one each century, which suggest direction. The 17th century gave us the scientific revolution, the 18th century the political revolution and republican forms of government, the 19th century the industrial revolution, and the 20th century the technological revolution. I think that unless we tie all these together with some form of humanist or spiritual revolution in the 21st century, the future looks grim.

But I am not counselling despair. If you look back over the last four centuries and their revolutions, you see that these did not come from the top down, but from the bottom up. They were started by individuals working alone. The scientific revolution started with men like Galileo, Newton, and van Leeuwenhoek. The great political revolutions of the 18th century began with thinkers like Locke, Jefferson, and Rousseau. The 19th century industrial revolution resulted from the efforts of English nonconformist businessmen who had been denied university education because they did not belong to the Church of England. Forced to make a living without proper connections, they started small factories. The 20th century technical revolution was initiated by men like Lee De Forest, Bob Neuss, Kilby, Gates, and Jobs, who all started very small. Individually initiated revolutions are, therefore, not unprecedented.

So the ball is in your court and mine. The fact that you are reading this indicates some interest in both wisdom traditions and technology. It falls to each of us, as individuals and as small groups, to take the wisdom we have inherited from our ancestors and apply them to the world we live in. One simple way to do this is to ask, every time we make a purchase: Is this something that will enhance

my knowledge of myself, that will help me live a life of moderation, that will help me be emphatic towards others? If it doesn't pass this test, don't buy it. I do marketing for a living, and believe me, in a consumer society, if people don't buy things, they don't get produced. You have more power than you realize in terms of what gets produced and sold.

The other great thing about the technological revolution is that we are not its victims. We have the power to control it. If you look at the sweep of technology, in the beginning it enhanced the power of our muscles—the wheel, the lever, the fulcrum, the pulley. In the 16th century, it began to enhance the power of our senses—the telescope, the microscope, and later, the radio and other developments. In our own lifetime, technology has begun to enhance the power of our minds. Computers allow us to store and more quickly process vast amounts of information. And there may be a fourth stage, in which technology enhances the power of our spirits—our empathy toward others, and our desire to know ourselves. But this revolution will not come from our institutions. It must come from the ground up, like all the others, from us. □

Ramakrishna Visits Germany!

Mr Ady was a German soldier who was critically wounded during World War I. One day, as he lay dying in the hospital, Ady had a vision of a strange person with a benign face who sat on his bed and placed his hand over his head and body. This vision continued for a couple of days. Ady was then mysteriously cured. After his release from the hospital, Ady was haunted by the memory of that strange person till 1934, when he came to New York and happened to see in a book a photo of Sri Ramakrishna. Ady travelled to India and met Swami Akhandananda, who was then the president of the Ramakrishna Order. He received initiation and later *brahmacharya* from Swami Akhandananda, whom he served till the swami's passing. Later, Br Adi Chaitanya sought permission to practise sadhana in the Himalayas. After leaving Belur Math, no one ever heard from him again.

The World Deified

BR SWARUPACHAITANYA

In this beautiful article, Brahmachari Swarupachaitanya from our Narottam Nagar centre uses instances from Sri Ramakrishna's life to suggest how we can deify the universe.

We perceive the world with our mind and sense organs. All our perceptions are conditioned by the mind and the senses. From the objective point of view, the existence of the external world cannot be denied. But whenever we try to ascertain the real nature of the world, our perception gets conditioned by the limitations of the mind and the senses. Perceptions are primarily the projections of our mind. A pearl oyster's secretion around a sand particle results in the formation of a pearl. Similarly, the universe we perceive is actually our mental projection around a certain entity whose real nature is not known. Hence, what we perceive is not the real nature of the external world. Our perception may confirm the world's existence, but it cannot confirm the real nature of existence itself. To cite a few examples, this world appears colourful to a human being. But there are some animals like dogs which perceive everything as bright and dark (black and white). This happens due to some difference in the anatomical structure between a human eye and a dog's eye. For the same reason, an owl can see clearly at night but cannot see properly during daytime. Numerous such examples can be cited to show that the same world is perceived differently by different species of living beings.

Again, if human perception alone is considered, we can observe a lot of variations there also. As an illustration, the parable of observing the stump of a tree at dusk by different persons could be cited: a thief from a distance perceives it as a policeman, a policeman as a thief, a newcomer as a guidepost, and so on. In one of his lectures on *Jnana Yoga*,

Swami Vivekananda points out this perceptual anomaly and gives another illustration. A bag of gold was lying on a table. A man came, picked up the bag and walked away. A child who was present there witnessed the whole thing but could not comprehend that it was theft at all because of his innocence.

Thus, it is seen that our perceptions are all coloured by our psycho-physical make-up. Nothing can be perceived 'as it is', though the world is 'as it is'. It is our perception which makes all the difference. The external world is a 'fact'. Our joys and sorrows in life depend on how we react to that 'fact'. We often consider that external circumstances contribute to our joys and sufferings. But they are only secondary causes. It is our mental outlook, our vision of life, which is the actual source of trouble.

Generally perceived, this ever changeful world is full of misery, suffering and meanness; but when perceived from a higher standpoint, it gets transformed into an eternal playground of the ever-blissful God. Behind all changes we see the Changeless, as if He has manifested Himself as the entire cosmos. He, the ever blissful, as if to taste His own bliss, has become many. From such a standpoint the whole world gets deified.

If we study the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find that he was firmly established in such an exalted standpoint. Whatever he used to perceive would some way or other ignite his higher faculty, ultimately leading him to an intense absorption, thereby making him totally oblivious of his body and surroundings. Such incidents occurred even during his childhood. One time, while passing through

the paddy fields, the enchanting scenery of white cranes flying against the background of black clouds led him to ecstasy. He lost himself completely and entered into the solitary domain of the Spirit. Again, while enacting the role of Shiva on Maha Shivaratri night he became so intensely absorbed in the thought of Shiva that he lost consciousness of his immediate surroundings. In later life, we find that even insignificant day-to-day events would transport him to higher levels of consciousness. His worship of God in the form of the Divine Mother culminated in an exalted standpoint from where he visualized all female forms to be the manifestation of the Divine Mother. Even women of ill-repute would appear to him as the Divine Mother. To the Holy Mother who enquired him while massaging his feet one day about his attitude towards her, Sri Ramakrishna replied that the Divine Mother who resides in the temple of Dakshineswar was really the one who gave birth to him and it was again she who was massaging his feet.

Once while passing through the streets of Calcutta he saw an English boy leaning against a pillar with his arms folded and one leg crossed over the other. That posture immediately brought to his mind the benign form of Lord Krishna and overwhelmed him with ecstasy. When he was taken to the Calcutta zoo, he entered into samadhi by seeing the lion. The lion being the carrier of goddess Durga, its vision enkindled in him the thought of the Divine Mother. While passing through BT Road in Calcutta, he remarked that that road was straight like the yogi's heart.

While seeing a man closing his umbrella he observed that a spiritual aspirant must try to concentrate the scattered mind on God in a similar way. Once he saw a fossil in a museum. The fossil brought to his mind the utility of holy company. The contours and linings of the branch of a tree lying buried for a long time under the layers of forming stones get imprinted on the formed stones. When ob-

served, such a fossil appears to be the branch of a tree which has got converted into stone. Similarly a man imbibes all the qualities of a saint by staying in his company and serving him with one-pointed devotion.

Once, with the simplicity and eagerness of a child, he wanted to see the bioscope on display while passing through a street in Calcutta. One of the slides in the bioscope projected the picture of Badrinath. Seeing it, he immediately entered into samadhi. When he regained normal consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna asked the devotee accompanying him to pay the required charge to the owner of the bioscope. When the devotee paid a few annas, Sri Ramakrishna became visibly irritated. He expressed his unhappiness over the devotee's paying so less. How can the vision of Lord Badrinath at the Badrinath Temple be had by spending a few annas? The devotee understood the Master's mental attitude and paid a substantial amount.

It must not be concluded from all these incidents that Sri Ramakrishna's life was a stream of uninterrupted bliss. Even he had to suffer intensely. But his sufferings were of a different nature. His standpoint of joy and suffering were totally different from those of an ordinary person. His sense of oneness with the entire universe used to make him feel intense pain at the sight of other people's sufferings. Once Sri Ramakrishna observed two boatmen standing on their boats anchored on the bank of the river Ganga. They were quarrelling over some matter. The quarrel intensified and one of them gave a blow on the back of the other. Sri Ramakrishna got so much identified with the assaulted boatman that he cried out in agony and his back, too, became red and swollen! Again, seeing a man walking over a lawn covered with green grass, he felt an unbearable pain in his chest. He felt as if the man had trampled his chest!

While going through a village near Vaidyanath on his way to Vrindaban, Varanasi and other places on pilgrimage, Sri Ramakrishna's heart overflowed with com-

passion at the sight of the misery of the villagers. He requested Mathur to feed the villagers one day and give each villager a dhoti. When Mathur hesitated, thinking about the huge expenditure he would have to incur by doing this, Sri Ramakrishna said that unless the poor villagers were served he would not proceed further. Mathur had to comply with Sri Ramakrishna's request.

Sri Ramakrishna's compassion was not a feeling that we have sometimes; it was not compassion in the ordinary sense of the term. Ordinarily, when we feel compassion for others there is the idea that we are superior to the suffering individual. We feel that *we* shall bring the person out of suffering. But Sri Ramakrishna's compassion was born out of his awareness of the existence of the Divine in all beings. This is evident from the following event. One day, sometime in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room, surrounded by devotees. He was explaining the essence of the Vaishnava faith, which according to him was centred around the observance of three things, namely a taste for God's name, compassion for all beings, and service of the Vaishnavas. No sooner had he uttered the words 'compassion for all beings' than he suddenly went into ecstasy. Regaining consciousness, he continued, 'Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creatures that you are, how can you show compassion to beings?—No, no; it is not compassion to Jivas, but service to them as Siva.' Though all heard those words of the Master, none but Swami Vivekananda (then Narendranath) could comprehend its true implication. In those few words of the Master Swami Vivekananda had found the gospel for the present age. He remarked later, that formerly when the aspirant tried to attain the non-dual knowledge as prescribed in ancient works he regarded the whole universe and each person in it as obstacles in the path of his spiritual progress—an attitude which produced in man a sort of

antipathy towards society and often led them away from true spiritual path. But from what the Master in ecstasy said, it is gathered that the Vedanta of the forest can be brought to human habitation, and that it can be applied in practice to the work-a-day world. Let man do everything he is doing; there is no harm in that; it is sufficient for him, first, to be fully convinced that it is God who is manifested before him as the universe and all beings in it. If he can thus look upon all persons of the world as Siva, how can there be any occasion for him to regard himself as superior to them or cherish anger and hatred for them or an arrogant attitude towards them, or even to be kind of them? Thus serving the Jivas as Siva, he will have his heart purified and be convinced in a short time that he himself is also a part of God, the Bliss Absolute, the eternally pure, wakeful and free Being.

It is this vision of Sri Ramakrishna which has got concretised in the form of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission under the inspiration and guidance of Swami Vivekananda. It is believed by all devotees that Sri Ramakrishna still exists in the form of the organization named after him and, using Swamiji's words, it will continue to exist serving humankind in various ways 'until the entire world shall come to know that it is one with God.' According to Swami Vivekananda, a prophet is a person who has not only traversed in one life the entire past of human civilization but also the evolutionary steps of future generations. Thus the deified world visualized by Sri Ramakrishna in recent times is a glimpse of the outlook which all of humankind ought to have in future. The world of ever changing matter will then vanish from humankind's perception. In its place will be perceived the eternally changeless, omnipresent God, manifesting Himself in this universe in manifold ways. The entire world will thus become deified! □

Dear reader, our heartiest Bengali New Year greetings to you!

The Message of Guru Nanak

DR JASJIT SINGH WALIA

This month the year-long tercentenary celebrations of the formation of Khalsa will be concluded. We publish a summary of the message of Guru Nanak on this occasion. Dr Walia teaches chemistry at the Loyola University, New Orleans, USA.

Our Decaying Moral Values

In spite of all the comforts and luxuries of life, people in general are feeling a deep vacuum within. When we look around, we see signs of moral and spiritual decay, and of conflicts and contradictions; this can be seen even in our own life. We have a host of problems: prejudice, racism, violence, exploitation, superstition, moral and critical degeneration. Personally, many of us try to hide personal problems by thriving on showing off, on self-glorification, on egotism and love-of-self. This surely deprives us of peace, happiness, and health. On the other hand, when we examine the present-day culture and society all over the world, we notice that many of us do not practise even the fundamental virtues of righteous and truthful living. This in turn leads us to commit evil and sinful deeds. Today most people believe it is okay to lie, that it is okay to get what we want by any means. This is self-sabotaging behaviour. No wonder then, there is a moral crisis in the

world. Statistics after statistics point to painfully disturbing and escalating ethical and moral lapses in our personal, social, and professional lives. Can we actually feel good about the gains made through deceit and unethical means? Thus the scenario looks pretty grim. However, there are some positive points too. We are hungering to find a meaning for our life and existence on earth. Many of us are yearning for a natural connection with some divine power. Many are searching for a higher bond we can hold on to, to attain peace of mind, personal security and stability. This is vital, because our becoming better is crucial—not just for our own survival, but for the general welfare of the world community.

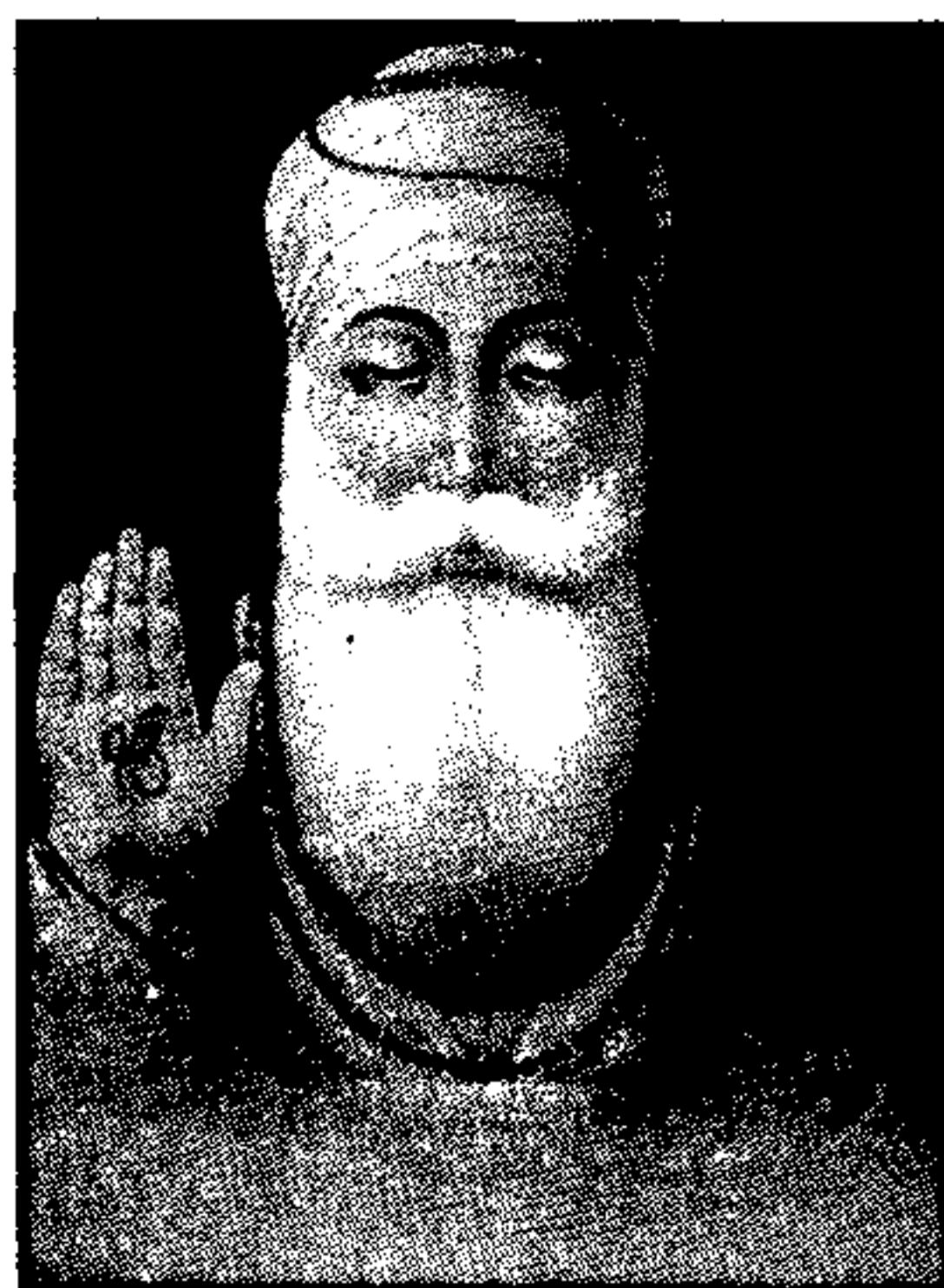
Is Our Mind Healthy or Sick?

Tragically enough, our culture and society appear to thrive on the leadership of sick minds, whose only motto is to destroy the very fabric of our civilization. Many pose as virtuous people, as leaders and great ones, but their inside is not really pure.

Something is terribly wrong. Life is presenting us with challenges that appear to defy our strongest efforts to overcome them. The question is, can our sick mind be cured, and can this trend be reversed? I firmly believe that it can be done. Guru Nanak Dev constantly reminds us of the five evils, namely, lust, anger, greed, worldly attachments, and egotism, which rob our mind of peace and contentment. We, therefore, need to control and discipline our mind.

Medicine for Our Troubled Mind

It is obvious that our mind is constantly under attack from the inner enemies men-



Guru Nanak

tioned above. When our mind becomes a slave to the powerful influences of these evils, it becomes resistant to all the good our mind is inherently capable of performing. What is needed is cleansing the mind through taming and disciplining of our mind. In the holy *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* Guru Nanak Dev constantly reminds us that our mind must be controlled so that its unhealthy dictates can be overcome.

The crucial question is, how can the mind be tamed? Guru Nanak Dev advises us that the mind is tamed by faithfully following the instructions contained in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* in the form of divinely inspired hymns called *shabads* and *naam*, the Word.

Management of Our Sick Mind

The problems involving our sick mind undoubtedly overwhelm us, and may even seem insurmountable. But the situation is not really that hopeless once we understand the weakness and fragile nature of our mind. The mere realization of this fact, that this problem exists, is a great help; it is sufficient to help us to do something so that we may have a life of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

We must begin with a goal. Then, we should persist until we accomplish it, working each day to achieve that part of the plan that builds on the previous part and lays the foundation for the next. Easier said than done, most people would say. But we must remember that success is not always easy. In fact, true success is seldom easy. What is easy, everyone has. What is difficult we can make easier by effort. With a definite plan of attack, we can make the difficult easier. We can find ways even through holdups, hangups, and obstacles. But it calls for a serious commitment on our part to review our behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

Guru Nanak Dev advises us, first, to completely empty our mind of these corrupting and polluting influences. Second, he asks us to refill our mind with the noble qualities of humility, contentment, truth, love, kindness and justice. We need to propel our mind



Guru Gobind Singh, the founder of Khalsa

in the direction of *naam*, the divinely inspired Word. We are instructed in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* to first dye our mind with *naam*. How to achieve this? Guru Nanak Dev tells us that this is to be accomplished through prayer, and by seeking God's grace.

Passionate Prayer Results in Divine Grace and Mercy

It is absolutely essential that we seek divine grace, for this is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful control of the mind. When we place our unwavering faith in God and offer ourselves at His mercy, the attempts we make and the steps we take are certain to succeed because we will be guided and directed by God.

Guru Nanak Dev instructs us to start with a very intense personal prayer, recited with a completely focused mind, and to petition almighty God in a most humble way for the blessing of divine grace. Only then will our mind become receptive to God's love and grace. Furthermore, while seeking God's grace we also pray intensely for divine mercy. The combined effect of divine grace and mercy is to rekindle our mind and body so that we are re-awakened to the ever-present divine life-current in us. Such an effect produces in us a deep sense of gratitude, and steers us to become humble. This is all the result of wholehearted prayer. Prayer is thus the single most important factor in first initiating and then sustaining a warm relation-

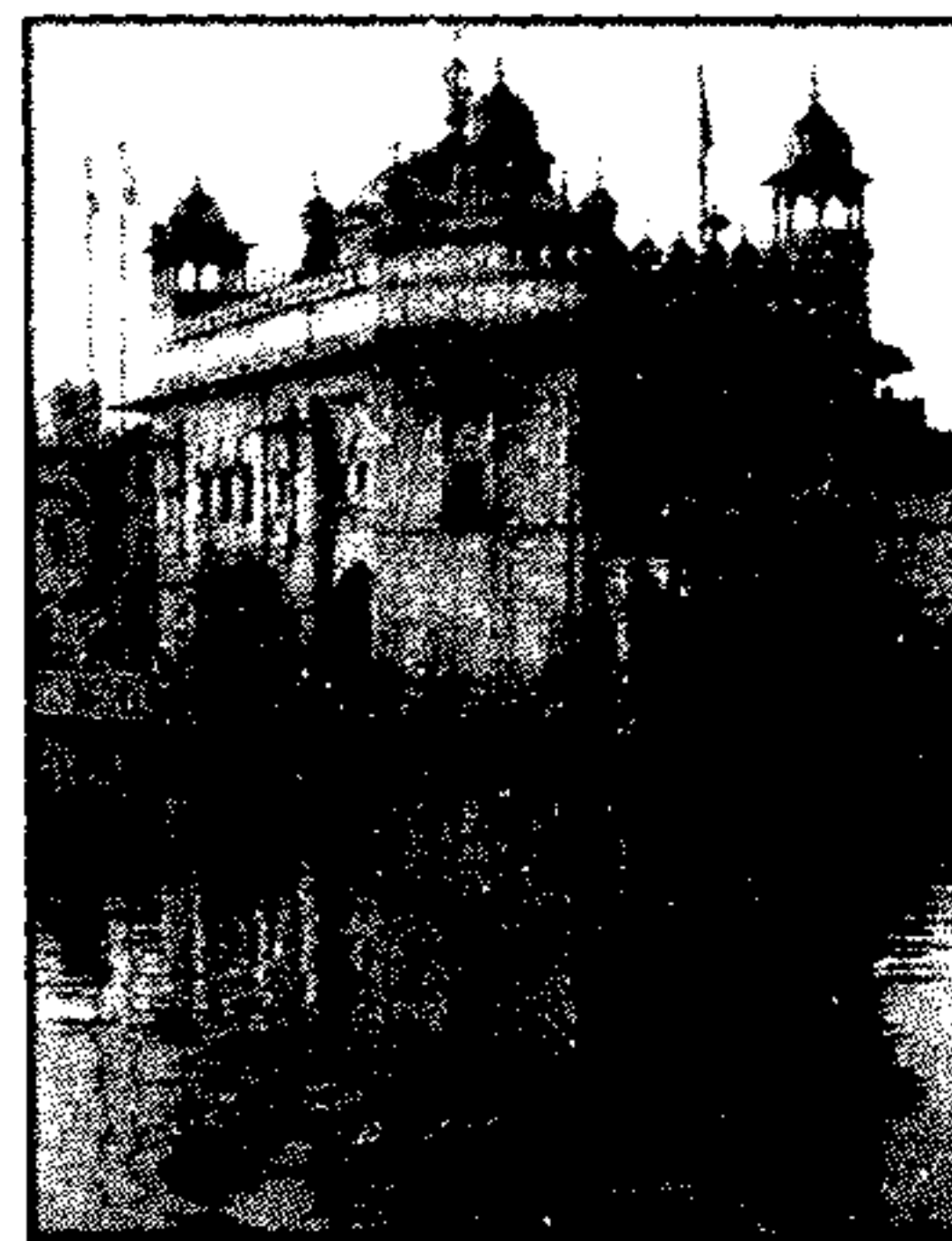
ship with God. Here, it is understood that prayer is offered most sincerely from one's mind and heart. It is important that while praying we have unwavering faith in God, be upbeat, and have a firm determination clearly focused on our desired goal.

The unforeseen spiritual forces within us will keep us focused on our objective. Only then will prayer have its intended effect. There are many different prayers we can recite. But the ideal prayer is derived from the divinely inspired hymns (*shabads*) which represent truth and truth alone. Therefore, what better prayer can there be than those contained in the holy *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*?

The Magic that Prayer Is

Guru Nanak Dev counsels us that prayer in its simplest form constitutes simple recitation, remembering, singing, reflecting, and listening to divine hymns. Prayer must include a total involvement of one's tongue, mind and body, and may be recited in a low, sweet and melodious tone, preferably without interruption of any kind. However, the hymns recited through singing may be high-pitched, and may be accompanied with musical instruments, as would be the case with *kirtans*. A mere listening to *kirtans* would produce a soothing and calming effect on our mind. It is, however, necessary that while reciting, singing, and/or listening to hymns, our mind should be focused on the message contained in them. It is only then that we are truly immersed in the hymns.

One may ask, why should we praise, admire and adulate God? This doubt arises because amongst human beings, when we praise others it is usually out of a feeling of inferiority, insecurity, and selfishness; ie, in order to gain something from the person being praised. One wonders naturally then, why so much emphasis on recitation and singing of hymns in praise of God who is most certainly free from any pride or vanity. Why even worship God? God certainly does not need them. God only wants us to become immaculately clean, pure, truthful, and holy.



The Golden Temple, Amritsar

Guru Nanak Dev answers by telling us that we become pure and holy only after the dirt of the five evils is completely eliminated from our mind. This purification is accomplished through divine praise, which in turn brings humility within.

Daily Spiritual Exercises According to Guru Nanak

Now, what specifically are Guru Nanak Dev's instructions? Some of the teachings from the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the representative ones, which I shall call 'Ten Commandments' for acquiring mental equanimity, are as follows:

1. Believe in one God, whose name is Absolute Truth, and who is realized through divine grace of a true guru.
2. Have faith in the name of God.
3. Believe in the idea that a higher order prevails eternally.
4. Accept the divine will.
5. Practise the five daily virtues: praising the Lord, satisfaction, humility, charity, and self-control.
6. Beautify yourself with truthfulness, contentment, compassion, and righteousness.
7. Cultivate sweetness of tongue, and be humble; these are the essence of virtue.
8. With your ears hear God's praise, with your tongue sing the praises of the Lord, and with your hands earn an honest living. Do altruistic and unselfish service, and demonstrate goodwill toward all people (regardless of

faith, race, sex, caste, creed or nationality).

9. Bow down at the feet of the *satguru* (God), and meditate on God's *naam*, especially in the early hours of the morning.

10. Associate with saintly people (*satsang*) because this is one of the ways to become holy.

The following conversation between Guru Ram Das (the third Guru) and his devotees beautifully illustrates the great value of the spiritual exercises described above. Once, Guru Ram Das held an evening discourse with some of his very devoted Sikhs, namely Bhais Tirtha, Bishan Das, Manak Chand, Maha Chand, Triloka, etc. Bhai Manak Chand got up and asked the Guru, 'O benefactor, we are family people and are constantly being attacked by the five evil enemies from within. Please tell us some magical formula so that we may have peace of mind.' Guru Ram Das said, 'O my dear ones, you can obtain peace of mind if you follow the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev.' Continuing, he said, 'Our mind is like that of a black crow, who like mercury

has a fluctuating nature, and keeps on pricking every place with its beak hoping to find food even though none may be there. In the same way the human mind is always vacillating—always looking for worldly gains. When one is unable to acquire these gains one gets terribly disappointed, and this leads to loss of mental peace. During this process one forgets God, forgets all the blessings one has, and hankers after worldly pleasures. Thus such a person is under tremendous physical stress and mental strain as if a big stone has been placed on his chest. This stress and strain can be easily and readily relieved through Guru Nanak's divine instructions.' Guru Nanak Dev's divinely inspired message is, therefore, as new and timely today as it was when originally imparted. This universal recipe provided by Guru Nanak Dev is for all the people of the world, and for all the time, is applicable to all sections of our society, irrespective of one's national or religious affiliation. □

Guru Gobind Singh Tells Banda Bairagi...

'No, Bairagi! It is not new. It is the rebirth of the ancient, a rediscovery of what had been forgotten, a rediscovery of dharma and dharma alone. It is the law eternal that sustains samsara, the reality in flux. No one can create dharma afresh, it is the only existential reality known, between us mortals and the Timeless. All we can do is restate it. And we, the sons and daughters of this ancient land, know more than anyone else the validity of this principle. Rama did it before. Krishna did it before. The Buddha too did it before. But there is one important difference which must be understood: they were God Himself, God descended on earth! They fought the forces of *adharma* and restored the kingdom of dharma on earth. And now comes Nanak, a different kind of man, the man spiritual, mind you, not God on earth! But the Guru, the saviour and servant of men.'

—adapted from P.K. Nijhawan's *Sri Guru Gobind Geeta*

Ramakrishna Math's Millennium Gift to Devotees

Consecration of the Universal Temple in Chennai: 7 February 2000



Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta - V

DR ALAN HUNTER

(continued from the previous issue)

Thus one major feature shared by Vedanta and Chinese Buddhism (at least in their twentieth century incarnations as Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta and Taiwanese humanitarian Buddhism) is that they are relatively complete and holistic. They offer guidance for different personalities at different stages of their spiritual development, from more rudimentary forms of devotion or social service, through to metaphysics or the renunciate's life. To implement this catholic purpose, both developed the range of methods, techniques, and philosophies, known in Buddhism as skilful means: not absolutely true in themselves, but essential paths to truth.

Another point worth considering is the time at which the Ramakrishna movement and Chinese Buddhism started to emphasize the importance of service to humanity even as an integral part of monastic life. The idea took shape in both cases around the period 1900-1930, and, also in both cases, it elicited opposition from more conservative monastics. I wonder whether some features of the early twentieth century stimulated Swami Vivekananda and Tai Xu to these parallel developments. One factor may have been the challenge of Christianity, which was better organized and more evangelistic than the older religions. Another was the creation of new social classes notably in Calcutta (home of the Ramakrishna movement) and Shanghai (an important centre for the Buddhist revival in the 1920s and 1930s), the great metropolises of Asia and, incidentally major bases for colonial powers. The new urbanites were more literate and critical than their rural ancestors. They might expect a higher standard of education from the monastic orders, and might

be more understanding of doctrinal innovations, for example the commitment to welfare work. Better access to education immensely increased the power of the printed word and the importance of high-quality publications, another area on which the Ramakrishna movement and Chinese Buddhism placed great emphasis.

The first decades of the twentieth century, then, saw both Vedanta and Chinese Buddhism in transition, as indeed Indian and Chinese society was in transition. On balance, I think it is fair to say that both achieved a good degree of success in defining a new role in society. Religious movements constantly have to adapt to a changing environment and to make many tough decisions: how to retain their essence while facing new social and economic issues. One can observe similar struggles recently in the Roman Catholic church in the West. Very few young men are now willing to lead a celibate life, yet Roman Catholicism has insisted on a celibate priesthood for two thousand years. The Roman Catholic church has also excluded women from sacramental offices, yet this tradition is now regarded as hopelessly outdated by many of its own members. It remains to be seen whether the Church will retain its ancient traditions or adapt. Similar questions were faced by Fokuangshan in contemporary Taiwan: for example, modern Chinese generally expect a high degree of gender equality and easy, informal working relations between men and women, something that traditional Buddhist orders found totally unacceptable. In this instance, it is the traditional attitude that has given way, and nuns, monks, and lay-women and men work and worship together.

Despite the environmental and doctrinal shifts, the Ramakrishna-Vedanta movement and some schools at least of Chinese Buddhism have managed to preserve intact, into the early twenty-first century, the essence of ancient religion, the 'perennial philosophy'. It is suggestive that both now have centres in many parts of the world, serving individuals who seek spiritual truths that may have been lost or submerged over the centuries in other religious traditions. Does this ability to survive and expand point to another commonality? Perhaps one factor has been the unbroken continuity of classical literary traditions, Sanskrit in one case, and classical Chinese in the other, which has preserved the ancient texts (for example the Upanishads and the Chinese Buddhist sutras) throughout the generations. Still today, many educated Chinese (not only those interested in religion) read classical Chinese, and it is relatively easy for young monks or lay-people to read the classic texts, and certainly those that have appeared in modern critical editions. In fact, these texts, and I would guess in India as in China, are more widely available today than at any time in the past. In this matter, religious people should also acknowledge the important role played by secular scholars and cultural nationalists, who managed to preserve Hindu (perhaps one should also mention Bengali) and Chinese culture throughout the long centuries of colonial pressure.

Another factor has certainly been the appearance from time to time of outstanding individuals who provoke a resurgence, purification or re-evaluation of a tradition, injecting new life and spirit, and often inspiring a whole generation of practitioners. Swami Vivekananda obviously played this role, and I have mentioned a few Chinese monks who have profoundly influenced modern Buddhism. Geniuses, however great, need to relate to an existing culture. Again, it was of the utmost importance that India and China had preserved monastic and religious lay traditions into the twentieth century. Idealistic

young men and women could respond to the message of such geniuses, perhaps by updating or challenging existing norms; but they did not need to start from scratch. The revivals of Vedanta and Chinese Buddhism built on structures that have been preserved for centuries.

I opened this paper by wondering whether the commonalities between the two traditions are merely co-incidental, or whether they are significant. I would argue the latter. In my opinion it is impossible to understand either religious tradition fully, without considering the historical perspective, and history shows that neither is 'pure' Indian or Chinese. Bengali Vedanta and Chinese Buddhism grow from a profound interaction that first took place over a thousand years ago. It is true that it will be difficult, perhaps never possible, to determine exactly which aspects were provided by which culture. Second, we may gain a broader perspective on religious developments in the formative period 1900-1930 by reflecting that similar problems, and solutions, appear to have surfaced in India and China, and even, more specifically, around Calcutta and Shanghai. Third, we should acknowledge the fortunate, or providential, appearance of outstanding talents, individuals who provided guidance which still seems relevant now. Fourth, both traditions are holistic and provide all-round spiritual guidance, rather than a narrow focus. Finally, both owe much to the preservation of classical languages and traditional institutions into the twentieth century, and more generally to the vitality of cultures that were able to withstand colonialism. As mentioned at the start of the paper, languages and metaphysics differ, but many fundamental similarities in concepts and practice can be seen.

Perhaps the most important question of all is whether the twenty-first century will see the rebirth of religious exchanges between India and China, a development that could affect the whole world. The circumstances are

now more auspicious than for several centuries. Providing the political settlement holds, there will certainly be increased commerce and communications, more cross-border traffic, joint academic and technical work and so on. We have seen that an earlier period of exchange was formative in the creation of Bengali tantra, Chinese esoteric Buddhism,

and doubtless other important developments. Would new marvels emerge from renewed contact? It is a humbling thought that our ancestors would trek for years through bandit country to exchange ideas, texts, and practices. I wonder if we have the same dedication today. □

The Buddha's Teaching

Gautama Buddha's son Rahula was only seven or eight years old when he entered the Sangha. Having been the darling of his royal family, the boy was somewhat restless, and told lies too at times. Because he was the Buddha's son, the other bhikkhus pardoned his little slips. However, when the Buddha came to know of his son's faults, he instantly sent him away to a vihara far away in a village called Amra Yashtika. Some days later, Tathagata visited this vihara. Rahula was overjoyed to see his father. The Buddha told Rahula to bring water in a vessel and wash his feet. Rahula did as he was told. After the washing, Tathagata asked Rahula, 'Do you think this water is drinkable now?' Rahula replied, 'No, revered sir, it's not. It has become defiled and dirty.' The Buddha told him, 'Ponder over your words now, Rahula. You are Gautama's son. Of your own accord you have renounced everything and become a monk. But still you aren't able to control your tongue. And so you are spoiling your mind like this water.' Rahula understood; he then took the vessel and threw the water away. The Buddha asked him, 'Can we keep drinking water in this vessel now?' Rahula said, 'No, revered sir, we can't. It has become defiled.' 'Think over your words deeply once again, O Rahula,' said Tathagata. 'Though you wear the robes of a monk, you still don't have love for truth. You are as defiled as this vessel. The high ideal of your life can't be attained through this attitude.' Later on, the Buddha took the empty vessel in his hand and started turning it round and round. 'Rahula, you must be worried that the vessel may break if it falls down, isn't it?' Rahula replied, 'No, revered sir, I'm not worried. The vessel is easily available and so there is no problem even if it breaks.' The Buddha said, 'Remember, dear Rahula, that you too are revolving in the endless cycle of rebirths in this manner. Just as no harm is done to anyone if this vessel breaks, no one suffers any loss if your body is destroyed. But if you become untruthful, you will be looked down upon by the learned ones.' Rahula had got the message. He hung his head in shame. The compassionate Buddha told his son a story. 'A certain king owned a huge elephant. Its strength was equal to some five hundred ordinary elephants. The mahout had taught the elephant to keep its long trunk curled because in case an arrow struck its trunk, the effect would be disastrous. Once the elephant was used in some war. Swords were tied to its tusks, an iron ball was tied to its tail, and its body was well protected. All the same, the elephant put out its trunk in the battlefield. The scared mahout instantly brought the elephant back and told the king, 'My lord, we can no more use this elephant in war. It would be fatal.' The Buddha added, 'Do you see, Rahula? If human beings can keep their tongues under check, everything will go well. Love for truth and simplicity will protect you from wrongdoing. If you are to follow dharma seriously, be calm, strong, and well controlled all your life.'

—contributed by Dr Aparna Sur, Calcutta

A Mathematician's View of Dvaita Philosophy

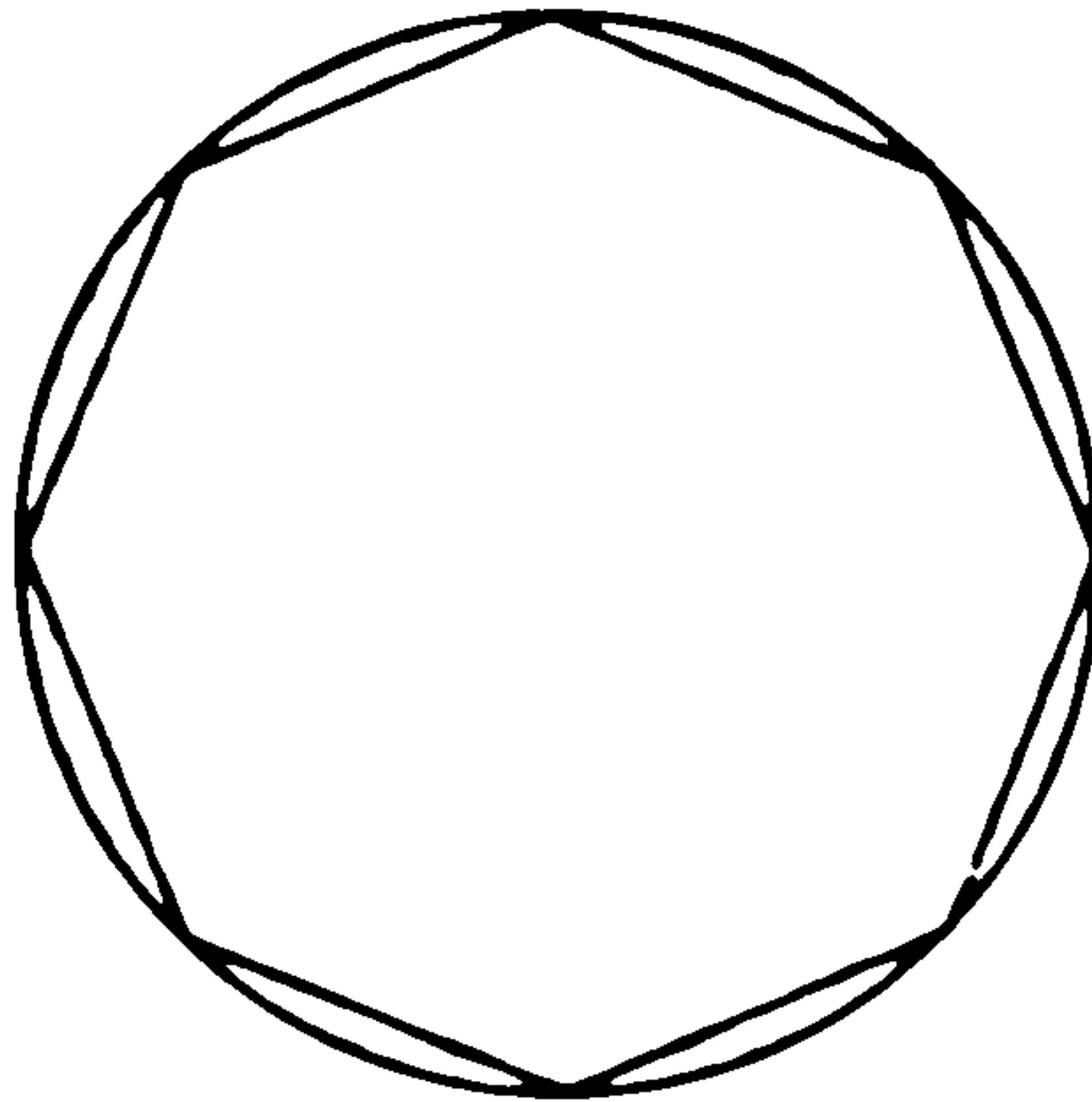
DR V. M. KORWAR

Here's a very interesting argument: Dvaita is demonstrated using simple mathematics. Dr Korwar was formerly professor of physics, Karnatak University, Dharwad. Apart from translating Stephen Hawking's A Brief History of Time into Kannada, the author has written The Theory of Relativity in the same language apart from 40 research papers.

The essence of Dvaita, as propounded by Madhvacharya, is that Paramatman (or Vishnu according to Dvaitins) and jivatman are different from one another. Secondly, Paramatman is unattainable by any human being by his or her efforts alone.

This concept is exactly like the concept of 'limit' in mathematics.

A simple example from geometry can help us understand this: A regular polygon (see figure) is inscribed in a circle. As the polygon is inscribed inside the circle, the area of the polygon is necessarily less than that of the circle. As one imagines the number of sides of the polygon to increase, the sides become shorter and shorter; the area of the polygon comes closer and closer to the area of the circle. As the number of sides tends to infinity, the two areas are almost equal but not completely so. The area of the circle always remains more than that of the polygon. However short the sides of the polygon might be, they remain segments of straight lines and hence they will never coincide with the arcs of a curve, so that the area of the circle remains unattained. We then say, mathematically, that the area of the circle is the 'limit' of the area of the polygon. The limit certainly exists but is unattainable.



As a second example, let us consider the geometric sequence: $1, 1/2, 1/2^2, 1/2^3, 1/2^4, 1/2^5 \dots 1/2^n$. As the value of 'n' in this sequence becomes higher and higher, the values of the n^{th} term $1/2^n$ becomes smaller and smaller. As 'n' tends to infinity, $1/2^n$ tends to zero. However, it cannot actually become

zero because the ratio of this term to its previous term would then be 0 and not $1/2$. This is because that is the common ratio of the geometric sequence. We say that zero is the limit of this sequence. Its existence cannot be denied, but it is unattainable.

As a third example, we have a similar instance in physics too. The absolute zero of temperature, ie -273°C , is not attainable theoretically or experimentally, although one can go very near it. In fact, one can even go on to the other side of it—the negative absolute temperature exists. Thus absolute zero is, mathematically speaking, the limit of temperatures from both sides of zero.

It may please be noted that the foregoing is neither a proof of the existence of Paramatman nor is it a proof of the reality of the Dvaita philosophy. It is just a mathematical way of looking at the concept. □

A Humble Farmer Turns Great Poet

Ramanavami will be celebrated on the 12th of this month. By the grace of Rama, a farmer became a poet laureate. We present his life, which is the condensed and modified version of the one published in Prabuddha Bharata in the February 1911 number.

Every language has produced writers and poets of excellence. The language of Andhra Pradesh, Telugu, also has many poets, old and new. Of them, Bhaskara, Srinatha, Mallana, etc are well known. The exuberance and richness of the chaste and sublime expressions they make use of in describing nature bears testimony to their innocent love of nature. Poets like Bhaskara, like Wordsworth and Shelley, have given forth a rapturous flood of melodious music in their effort to apprehend the Reality in nature. There are records of even a few first-rate poetical heroes who merged themselves in the Reality, and yet retaining their individuality at times burst forth into elegant and musical poetry; even a cursory reading of their works would make one thrill with ecstasy.

The foremost among the Telugu poets of this class is the blessed Potana (a Sanskrit word, meaning 'pure'), whose name is a household word in Andhra Pradesh. He is well remembered as the author of the *Srimad Andhra Bhagavatam*. Leaving aside the difference of opinion among Telugu writers as to the exact date of Potana's birth, it may be safely taken for granted that he flourished in the middle of the 14th century AD. As to his ancestry, according to the most authoritative records, we can trace it to no further than three generations. Somana had a son called Kesana whose name has been handed down to posterity as the worthy father of the revered Potana. Potana is said to have been born in 1378 AD. All the records extant on his life are totally silent about his childhood and boyhood.

Potana lived at Vontimitta, a village in the present Cuddapah district. Since his an-

cestors had all chosen agriculture as their profession, Potana too became a tiller of the soil. He was a poor farmer. Not being in a position to engage servants, he himself had to labour hard in the fields throughout the day in sun and rain and cold. His was the lot to suffer the pangs of bitter poverty. The roaring lion often lives in the darkest cave. Naturally enough, Potana in these days of boyhood, living among simple rustics, had neither the time nor the intention of devoting his life to study and contemplation.

One day, when he was grazing his cattle on a hill close by, it so chanced—perhaps the first incident in his life that brought on a sudden and thorough change in him—that he saw in a cave a strong figure sitting cross-legged, with eyes closed and the face wearing a bright and serene appearance. Who can know what the feelings of the rustic Potana were, but he fully prostrated himself before him and stood there with folded hands with all the devotion of a simple-minded villager. The yogi was Chidananda, who initiated Potana. He instructed Potana to repeat the name of Sri Rama.

Potana's later life was marked by a career altogether different from that of the old peasant. His simple rustic look gave place to the serious and thoughtful expression of the philosopher. He would not often be found now working in the fields or grazing his cattle. Forest recesses or solitary river banks were the places he now resorted to, where he would burst forth into spontaneous musical poetry. He hungered after the Truth with the yearning of an innocent child for its mother. Once he bathed in the river Tungabhadra, chanted the Sri Rama mantra, and sat in medi-

tation. How long he sat, he didn't know. There stood before him the blessed Lord, the lovely figure of Sri Rama. It was then, they say, that he received the command to compose the *Bhagavatam* in local dialect. Potana is even now revered as 'Andhra Vyasa' and 'natural scholar' (*sahaja pandita*).

While all poets of those days raised themselves to high rank and position by dedicating their works to the rulers of those days, Potana perhaps was the only one who preferred to suffer poverty by dedicating his work to the Lord rather than flatter the rich. 'Instead of expecting to receive lands, vehicles, jewels, wealth, and rank, Pota composed the *Bhagavatam* for the good of the world and dedicated it to Sri Hari,' says the first verse of the *Andhra Bhagavatam*.

His faith in the Lord enabled him to work miracles. Once when he was writing his *Bhagavatam* in his field and his son Mallana was tilling the land, the poet Srinatha was passing by in all pomp. The haughty Srinatha, in order to exhibit his psychic powers before Potana and induce him thereby to dedicate the work to his royal master, asked the front carriers of his palanquin to let go their hold and move aside. Curiously enough, the palanquin moved forward as before. Potana, who had the strong armour of God, instantly asked his son Mallana to unyoke one of the two oxen from his plough. The plough went on as before. Nothing discomfited, Srinatha ordered the back carriers of his palanquin also to withdraw. Potana too asked his son to untie the other ox also. So the palanquin was moving forward without carriers, and the plough was tilling the field without oxen!

When he was writing the story of the boar incarnation (*varaha-avatara*) in the third *skandha*, the chief of the region came with a strong escort to surround Potana's hut and take him prisoner because he was reluctant to dedicate his work to the chief. But the armed

troops ran away seeing an extraordinarily huge wild boar. Once when he was writing the story of the liberation of the great elephant (*Gajendra-moksha*) in the eighth *skandha*, the spontaneous flow of his poetry came to a dead end. He began deeply contemplating on the line which was to complete the verse. Being unable to make it up, he left it where it was. It is said that Lord Vishnu Himself came to his hut in his absence, disguised as Potana, and wrote the line and disappeared.

Potana was a great Vedantist as well. His work is wonderfully replete with high philosophical truths and startling Vedantic enquiries. One has to wade through the whole Telugu literature to meet with another work in which the accuracy of philosophical thoughts and the depth of earnest devotion are so harmoniously blended together. The sublime majestic verses describing the Gajendra's earnest prayers to the Supreme portray the loftiest spiritual attainments of the author. The soul-touching lines of exquisite beauty in the tenth *skandha* of his book, descriptive of the feelings of the gopis when their beloved Sri Krishna suddenly vanishes from amongst them, bear testimony to his highest emotional development. Thus Potana was a jnani and a bhakta in one. His poetry is spontaneous, yet artistic and musical. His style is chaste and pleasant.

Potana is said to have written two other works: a long poem, *Virabhadra Vijayam*, and a short treatise, *Bhogini Dandaka*. The one thing which is markedly appealing throughout his works is the burning passion for realization. His son Mallana inherited the high attainments of his father and came to be known as 'majestic poet' (*praudha kavi*).

Potana, the prince of poets, passed away in 1435 AD. He was not one who has greatness thrust on him, nor was he born great. But of him we may rightly conclude in the words of the poet, 'Who he is, that you judge!' □

What I Learned from Nature

'HIRANYAGARBHA'

Hiranyagarbha gives a summary of what a wanderer of the Bhagavata learns from nature. The author is an American national and lives in Hollywood.

A king asked a wanderer: You roam the earth, delighted as a child. How did you get this way? Did you have a teacher?

The wanderer replied, I had many, though none of them knew it. Here's what they told me:

From the earth, I learned that being walked over doesn't have to make you swerve from your path.

From the hillside, I learned that it's possible to give shelter to others.

From the wind, I learned to move among the things of this world and not become attached to them.

No matter how many people look up, there is only one sky. So there is only one self, known from different locations but always one. And the sky is never touched—not even by time.

From water, I learned to have the same sweetness for all.

From fire, bright and powerful ally, I learned that I don't need a shape of my own. Now I take all that is offered without letting it change me for long.

From the moon, staying the same from night to night while appearing to change, I learned that youth, age and death are appearances, too.

From the sun, I learned that whoever thinks she sees herself reflected in a pond has not seen herself, only a pond and a reflection.

From the python, I learned to conserve my strength and take what comes to me rather than go in search of someone else's life.

From the ocean, I learned that a wise person is calm, unknowably deep, and not easy to cross. With his mind in the Lord, his heart neither overflows its banks nor retreats

like a river after the flood season.

From the moth, I learned what can happen if you follow your bliss.

Like the bee gathering sweetness from various flowers, I took only the essence of different scriptures. There's good and bad in everything, but the bee has no use for all of it.

A dead fish wasn't too dead to remind me that there'd been a hook under the bait.

A sea-hawk carried a scrap of flesh in her mouth. When she finally dropped it, all the other birds left her alone.

The arrowsmith thinks of nothing but arrows while he's working. In order to penetrate the inner and outer worlds and be nothing but the self, one must be like that: sit firmly, control the breath and shake off all lethargy, gathering the scattered forces of the mind.

The snake lives just as happily in a hole made by others. Has wisdom ever stayed in just one place? Someone who's found it doesn't talk a lot, for he speaks only to help others, and words don't always help.

A spider, from her own body, weaves thread for her own use, then withdraws it into herself as the Lord spins the universe out of Herself and later takes it all back.

In order to placate the body one gives it in marriage, builds it a home and surrounds it with money. And then it dies like an unwatered tree.

From my own body, which remembers its birth but doesn't know it will die, I've learned that it is separate from me. With its help, may I see face-to-face the eternal Truth that is teaching me, the one whose names and forms are endless. □



Differences

When the venerable monk sat down to teach that day, he felt that something was wrong. He asked one of the disciples, 'You all appear to be somewhat worried today. May I know the reason?' There was no answer initially. But when the preceptor promised to help them in case of difficulty, one of them made bold and said, 'Venerable sir, we are all unhappy over some recent happenings.' The teacher straightened himself. He still couldn't catch their point. The other disciples, encouraged by their friend's talk, burst out: 'Venerable sir, we are sorry to say something bad about ...you.' 'About me?' asked the amazed preceptor. However, he smiled encouragingly and said, 'Do you have some complaint against me? Well, speak out. I shall try to correct myself in case I'm wrong.' Though initially diffident, their leader got up, bowed before the teacher, and said, 'Of late, a few things are going on here which have hurt all of us. To be precise, we're sorry that certain brahmanical principles are being flouted...' Now the preceptor understood and smiled. They were talking about his new disciple. But what had that poor boy done to them?

As he walked slowly along the main street one day, the master saw a strange scene. It was astonishing! People were laughing at what they saw. The preceptor, pointing to the source of astonishment, told his aide, 'My boy, go and bring that fellow here.' The aide went to him and said, 'My venerable preceptor wants to meet you.' That person did not care. He was busy with what he was doing. The disciple impatiently called him again. Now the person appeared to hear. 'Who's your teacher?' he asked. 'There...my preceptor is standing there, waiting for you.' That

person stopped what he was doing for a while, and told the lady who was with him, 'Please wait for a moment.' Approaching the venerable monk, he impatiently asked him, 'Sir, did you call me?' 'Yes my child, I did. What's your name?' 'My name is Dhanurdasa', replied the young man, 'and my mistress awaits me there. I shall have to go.' 'Yes, you will. But listen. What's this you're doing? Walking on this busy street, you are fanning your mistress with one hand and holding an umbrella with the other! You should know what propriety is! Don't you see! People are laughing at you?' 'Oh! I am ready to do anything for her,' said Dhanurdasa carelessly, and added, 'Well, was that why you called me, sir? Goodbye. She's waiting there for so long...' The master cut in: 'One question before you go. May I know what attracts you so much in her that you fan her and serve her like a slave in public, forgetting all refinement?' Even as he looked repeatedly towards his mistress, Dhanurdasa said proudly, 'Have you seen a pair of eyes like hers anywhere?' The preceptor smiled and replied, 'Oh, yes, I have. I can show you those eyes too.' 'A better pair than hers? Never! Anyway, if you can show me, I shall judge which pair is the best.' 'Okay then. Come this evening to my place.' Dhanurdasa bowed and walked over to his mistress. He continued his service to her as both walked by. For a few seconds, the old preceptor stood there and smilingly watched the cavalcade. He said to himself, 'Misplaced love! Misplaced love!'

It was evening. Dhanurdasa came to the temple complex to test the preceptor's words. The holy teacher had prayed to God to reveal His eyes to the hapless youth. And the Lord did! What Dhanurdasa saw thrilled him. He

shed torrential tears at the beatific vision of the beautiful eyes of the Lord. He fell at the teacher's feet and said, 'Revered sir, you've saved me. You've shown me a new path. Whose eyes could be more beautiful than the Lord's? I was foolishly attached to a mortal.' Dhanurdasa went home and told everything to his mistress. She too heard the incident with immense joy, and since that day, both became ardent devotees of the master.

While the teacher's mind was on that old incident, the disciples talked agitatedly. The teacher heard them calmly. 'While you go to bathe in the river, you keep your holy hands on a brahmin disciple for support. But while you return after bath, pure and clean, you keep your hands on that lowborn, Dhanurdasa!' That was their problem then. Since Dhanurdasa got transformed, he became an eager disciple of his teacher and would everyday come to serve him. After bath, the old monk would place his right hand on Dhanurdasa's shoulder and walk back everyday. The brahmin disciples were therefore irked. The master smiled and finally told the irritated disciples, 'We shall look into the matter.' Glad that they had given the teacher a piece of their mind, the disciples dispersed.

It was a few days after this. One day, there was a commotion in the disciple-camp. 'It must be you!' cried one. 'You idiot! I don't do such things. It must be him.' A real free-for-all! Foul words were no bar. The whole day passed with this skirmish. Neighbours, too, were astonished at the way the disciples quarrelled. 'What's the matter?' asked a neighbour. 'You see, some idiot has torn about four-finger width of cloth from all our dhotis.' 'Oh, that's nothing after all!' 'Did you say nothing? Had we caught the criminal, we would have taught him a nice lesson.'

Some days later, the preceptor told Dhanurdasa, 'Why don't you and your wife spend a day in this temple complex?' Considering it a blessing, Dhanurdasa came with his wife. Both were accommodated in a room.

Meanwhile, the teacher told his other disciples to go and stealthily remove all the ornaments from the person of Dhanurdasa's sleeping wife at night. The disciples, who had quarrelled a week ago because someone had torn their clothes, were ready. Dhanurdasa's wife wasn't sleeping; she was awake. But she pretended to be fast asleep. After her ornaments were removed from one side, in order to help them remove from the other side too, she changed sides as if in sleep. Fearing that she had woken up, the disciples ran away with whatever they got. The next morning, the couple took leave of the teacher to return home. The teacher told the other disciples: 'Follow the couple and report their conversation to me.' On the way, Dhanurdasa asked his wife, 'Surprising! You wear ornaments only on your right side but nothing on the other!' His wife said, 'I wish to narrate to you what happened yesterday, my lord.' She did, and added, 'Fearing that I woke up, they went away. I'm feeling very bad. Had I remained the way I was, they could have had a few more of my ornaments.' Dhanurdasa rebuked her, 'Ah, what a mistake! Why did you turn? To have troubled the poor brahmins! They are poor. You out of ignorance deprived the poor brahmins of a little money. I am so sad.' The wife too said she was sad.

The disciples stealthily heard everything and reported this conversation to their master. The venerable teacher smiled and said, 'Did you see? The other day, it was I who tore small pieces from all your dhotis. Seeing that, you quarrelled using such foul language! But now, when costly ornaments were stolen, the couple were worried about the thieves' welfare. ... My boys, you are unhappy because I walk with Dhanurdasa's support daily after bath. You think he is a low-caste.' The disciples had understood who real brahmins were and hung their heads in shame.

The great teacher was none other than Ramanuja, the propounder of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. □

Book Reviews

RE-VISIONING RAMAKRISHNA: By Dr M. Sivaramkrishna. Published by Sterling Paperbacks, L-10 Green Park Extension, New Delhi 110016. 1999. Pp. viii+207. Rs.200.

Spiritual writings form a special class of literature. Two types of people enhance spiritual literature: the mystics and the ordinary. There is a difference between mystical writing and that written from the ordinary plane of consciousness. The language of mystics is simple, but they speak from personal experience. The language of us ordinary people may be profound, but we do not have the experience to back our words. So our writings may appear superficial. However, when there is devotion behind our words, when there is love for the ideal, we too can bring out impressive works.

Re-Visioning Ramakrishna, has been written, according to what the author, Dr Sivaramakrishna, says in his Afterword, from 'the ceaseless flow of experiences (tangible, palpable) [that] shapes itself into words.' These 'experiences' are primarily due to his long acquaintance with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vedanta literature, and above all, the influence of a contemporary person named 'Sri Ram' of Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh. This book is sort of dedicated to him, and it is through his 'lenses' that the author has re-discovered and 're-visioned' the phenomena of Sri Ramakrishna.

It is a remarkable book, written in style, alternating between prose and verse, with ample poetic licence. It describes the intimacy of the author with the 'Presence'—Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Kali, one transposing into and appearing as the other and vice versa—rolling in the river of the author's exuberance. This exuberance at times overflows to drown them even in their cosmic aspect. Bhakti, *bhāva*, and *bhāvanā* commingle to form a word picture that weaves fact and fantasy of the *līlā* enacted by Sri Ramakrishna, mainly at Dakshineswar.

To quote a few lines: 'Bending in adoration I put a piece in his mouth, now fully open. I reel back! Hit in the face! Something I couldn't identify hissed at me. That hissing sound sends a chill down my spine. It seems it isn't there. The body itself seems to float and stretch itself across the sky, the earth. Wherever the eye falls, there is her radiant form! But the roving eye is transfixed, arrested in its tracks. "Just look at me! Nothing else matters. Simply see! Let all else cease!"....'

The author, a former head of the department of English at the Osmania University, has taken a few incidents and teachings from Sri Ramakrishna and amplified them through the telescope of love rather than that of knowledge. Part of the book is good poetry. The book forms the first part of a trilogy, the other two being *The One Behind the Many* and *Many Behind the One*, to be published by Sterling. The 36 'wave-visuals' (chapters, really speaking) are the author's personal inward journey and his own interpretation of the spiritual light, revealed to humankind through Sri Ramakrishna, assisted of course by 'Sri Ram'.

The quality of paper, printing, etc are all excellent. The publisher has an active collaboration with the author in publishing quite a few books, both on Sri Ramakrishna and 'Sri Ram'.

Swami Satyamayananda
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RETRIEVAL OF HISTORY FROM PURANIC MYTHS: By P.L. Bhargava. Published by D.K. Print World, 'Sri Kunj', F-52 Bali Nagar, Delhi. 1998. Pp. 146. Rs.200.

The Puranas are a well-known genre in Sanskrit literature. They deal with the creation and dissolution of the universe, and with the age of Manus (the ancestors of humanity). They also list the genealogies of Aryan kings and sages, and the life-stories of famous personages. Most of these names occur in Vedic literature also which is older and quite independent of the Puranas. The historicity of these great men and women of ancient India can be proved by a comparative and critical study of the Vedas and Puranas. The stories that surround them have, over a period of time, coalesced into myths and legends. It therefore becomes difficult at times to de-link the myth from the reality.

P.L. Bhargava's book, as its title suggests, is concerned with the retrieval of history from Puranic myths. The author, through meticulous research and critical analysis, discredits some of the widely-prevalent Puranic myths that surround some of these great men from the remote historical past. The men dealt with are Vishwamitra, Parashurama, Bhagiratha, Rama, Vyasa, Krishna, Yudhishtira, and Valmiki, whose mythologization over the centuries has obscured their true greatness. Mythology has been 'the bane of history as well as religion.'

The book consists of ten chapters. The title of nine of the chapters are in the form of questions, such as, 'Did Rama Banish his Wife Sita?', 'Was Vishwamitra the Father of Shakuntala?', 'Did Bhagiratha Bring the Ganga from Heaven?', 'Was Valmiki a Robber in his Youth?', and so on.

The interrogative structure of the contents sets the critical tone of the book. In each chapter, the author adopts a comparative analysis. The story in the Purana is compared with the story as it occurs in other texts of antiquity, such as the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and other Vedic texts. This methodology is effective in tracing anomalies, anachronisms, later interpolations, and sometimes, sheer mythologization which was perpetrated to suit vested interests. There is intense concentration on minute details of historical research. The author's commitment to his subject is evident in his meticulous and logical analysis. Nothing is based on conjecture or hypothetical assumptions. Some of the conclusions arrived at are that Rama did not banish Sita, and that Vishwamitra was not the father of Shakuntala. By demolishing these myths the author certifies clearly popular misconceptions which might mar an understanding of the true greatness of these men. The book provides illuminating and enriching insights. To know through historical evidence that these men and women did actually exist in history should prove to be heartening and ennobling to all.

The book has a transliteration chart. It ends with an exhaustive appendix, glossary, bibliography, and an index. The references are well documented at the end of each chapter. However, some typographical errors could have been avoided in what is otherwise an excellent book.

Dr Rama Nair

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IN QUEST OF THE INFINITE: By R.N. Roy. Published by Himalaya Publishing House, Delhi. 1998. Pp. 98. Rs.105.

In this collection of varied poems, R.N. Roy articulates the human being's desire to find inner peace through a quest for the Infinite. The book is prefaced by a stanza from the Vedas, 'Take me from evil to good, Take me from darkness to light, Take me from death to immortality.' There are fifty poems in this volume. The predominant strain of the poems is expressed in 'A Dream', where the poet states, 'I dream, often and often, of a city far-flung, In the far above, Aglow with Divine Love' (p. 2). But this seems to be 'A sinner's yearning for heaven! Never to be attained! A moth's

desire for the stars! And night's for the morrow' (p. 2). Other poems like 'The Modern Man' and 'I Will Never Yield' deal with the stress and strain of modern existence. The poet, however, seems to be heavily influenced by the style of the British Romantics like Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. In the Preface the poet states, 'I write poetry under a sort of compulsion which is indifferent to identity of sound between words or regular and rhythmic arrangement of syllables. However, where they occur, they are spontaneous, not deliberate....'

The book contains a few poems from his three earlier poetic works: *Shree Ramakrishna Paramahansa—A Hundred-Stanza English Poem*, *Shreemad Bhagavad Gita*, and *Shivaji Meets Afzal Khan and Other poems*. The others are selected from those written over a period of about fifty years.

The highlight of this collection is the apparent sincerity, honesty and commitment of the poet. Lovers of poetry will appreciate the quality and simplicity of the poems and the truths contained in them.

Dr Rama Nair

**VEDANTA VIS-A-VIS MODERN SCIENCE:
By Swami Mukhyananda. Published by
The Centre for Reshaping our World-
View, Calcutta. Available at Advaita
Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta
700014. Pp. 301. Rs.125.**

Science is not new to the Indian tradition. From the very outset of our culture we hear of *vidyās*, pure and applied. Our texts speak of a combination of *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. But something happened to us and so we could not produce what we call 'modern science' in India. Scholars advance various reasons for this deficiency. The esoteric viewpoint, developed by the Shramanic society and its impact on the Vedic tradition, is said to be one reason. Over-emphasizing the concept of *mokṣa* in the *puruṣārtha* theory is another reason. The *varṇāśrama* system is said to be yet another.

On the other hand, western society, with its Greco-Roman and Judaic combination, could and did develop a scientific worldview that has changed the face of the earth. Much credit for this is given to Protestant Christianity, especially to John Calvin's followers. People living on the northern shores of the Atlantic Ocean decided to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. And they succeeded to a great extent in this. But while attempting this, they could not avoid the side-effects of the fast growth of science and technology. We now realize the dehumanizing aspects of modernism but are helpless in many ways.

Swami Mukhyanandaji, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, has tried to provide a solution to the problem being faced by humankind today. Taking clues from the Upanishadic tradition, and leaning heavily on the thoughts of Vivekananda, he proposes that a harmonious combination of Vedanta and science will raise humanity to a higher level of culture and a fuller ideal in life. It will also lead us towards fulfilment both in the secular as well as in the spiritual fields.

In the book under review, the term 'Vedanta' stands for Advaita Vedanta, while 'Modern Science' stands for modern western science. Vedanta here is taken as the science of integral Reality. The author rightly holds that while maintaining a scientific and rational approach, Vedanta is a full philosophy of Reality, life and existence. It reveals that the true nature of man is divine. Man is a soul living in a body. The school of Vedanta makes us realize the oneness behind the many. It is deeply concerned with human values and their attainment.

Science, as understood by most of us, investigates the tangible part of the universe and excludes the investigator. It is limited to the empirical view of the individual. Science tries to increase our knowledge of the external world and make our life comfortable by manipulating material forces. However, it hardly goes into the fundamental questions behind the origin and meaning of the universe or of the human being.

Swami Vivekananda, during his two visits to the West, had expressed his ideas on the problem of the unity of material and spiritual ideals. He found that a combination of these two, in an integrated manner, would work for the total good of humankind. Such a combination, Swamiji held, would in time evolve in a new type of people who will be 'deep as the ocean and broad as the sky,' with all-round development of personality and ideals. Mukhyanandaji develops that idea here.

Swami Mukhyanandaji has several advantages, one of them being his close association with Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, the present president of the Ramakrishna Order. The latter is one of the senior-most living scholars in science and spirituality. Both Swamis have made a deep study of the works of Sankara, which are profoundly rational and are imbued with the scientific spirit. The author also has close contact with some of the leading scientists like Dr P.M. Bhargava and Prof T.S. Murty. Dr Bhargava, Director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad is somewhat critical of the stand taken by the author, while Prof Murty, ex-Director-General of the Madhya Pradesh Council of Science and Technology in Bhopal, appreciates his stand. Dr Murty, however, humbly confesses his own limitations to

understand the correlation the author has tried to establish between Vedanta and science. (The reviewer too is acquainted with Prof Murty and respects the humility expressed by the scientist.)

Vedanta vis-a-vis Modern Science clearly brings out the fact that many of the conclusions of modern science corroborate with those of Vedanta, though their methods are different. Both science and Vedanta gather facts, analyse experience, systematize knowledge, and try to find a unity, which is the source of the diversified phenomena. The difference is that, whereas science restricts itself to external phenomena, and mostly to the inanimate part of it, Vedanta takes a comprehensive view and includes the investigator, ie man himself. Man is also a part of nature, and nature on its part is one continuous whole. Vedanta posits that the ultimate Reality, designated as Brahman, is universal Consciousness in which nature, both animate and inanimate, takes its rise, rests, and merges back again. Vedanta also holds that, apart from the original pure Consciousness, the whole nature, including mind, is subject to space, time, and the causal law. The human being derives his freedom of thought and action from that part of his being which is beyond nature, ie the Atman (the Self). Swami Mukhyanandaji holds that Vedanta is science, philosophy, and religion—all rolled into one.

Modern science, Mukhyanandaji admits, has been transforming the life of man with its tremendous achievements. It has been helping us solve many of our mundane problems. It is also contributing to the advancement of our empirical knowledge. It has, further, brought the people of the world closer. But we all had hope for peace and prosperity, and our hope has been belied. Thinkers around the world, including scientists, have been compelled to review and re-evaluate the whole situation. They now realize that science does not cover all aspects of life. In this situation, efforts are being made to evolve a more harmonious world-view for the functioning of the human being. Vedanta enquires into the nature of a total experiential Reality and speaks of its realization. In the present world situation, we need the enlargement of the scope of science as well as the broadening out of religion and a harmonious integration of secular advancement (*abhyudaya*) and spiritual fulfilment (*nihsreyasa*). For this, both sides will have to make concessions. But each will be more advanced in truth and in the end knowledge, confined to space and time, will become one with that which is beyond them both, where the mind and senses cannot reach—the Brahman of Advaita.

The book discusses the subject matter in seven chapters and five appendices. A topical index is given at the end. A condensed chart, depicting the evolution of *brahmāṇḍa*, is also appended.

The book has been brought out as a deluxe edition to commemorate the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's triumphant return to India on 26 January 1897. The sale proceeds of the book will go to the 'Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral Home Project Fund'.

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GEMS OF SPEECH (SELECTED SANSKRIT SUBHASHITAS): By Manhar Jai. Published by Vakils, Feffer and Simons, Hague Buildings, 9 Sprott Road, Ballard Estate, Mumbai 400001. 1998. Pp.xx+100. Rs.250.

When one feels lazy one is spurred to action by remembering that 'Goals get accomplished only through effort and not by day-dreams. Deer certainly do not on their own volition enter the mouth of a sleeping lion.' Or, even better, combat both sloth and diffidence knowing that even the 'slow moving ant can travel a thousand miles (in course of time) whereas the son of Vinata (the divine eagle) cannot advance even one foot if it sits still.' If one is hurt by the stinging remarks of people blind to their own weaknesses, one may console oneself with the fact that such ones see 'the tiniest blemish, as small as a mustard seed, of another, but fail to see their own glaring faults, as large as the fruit of the bilva tree.' How many bureaucrats would not nod and sigh in assent when they read that serving power can 'prove to be as hazardous as licking the edge of a sword, or embracing a tigress or kissing the mouth of a snake.' How beautifully one is awakened to the wonders of hard work by the ironic statement that 'there is no possible comparison between the man of wealth and a labourer.' Why? Just look at the jewellery they wear. One is marked out by the glitter of his jewels and 'the other stands out by the sparkling drops of sweat on his brow.' Thus there are *subhāṣitas* for almost every occasion. These *Gems of Speech* teach us equally to laugh at ourselves as at others, to be warned of what to expect on occasion, to set standards, and to check whether they are kept up, to mitigate pain, to think and ponder.

These are mirrors of human nature. Manhar Jai has collected a typical sampling of them, written through the ages. We get a glimpse into whether

and how human nature has changed over a period of time. And we find that while contexts are varied the essential human temperament, the failings and the strengths, the tendencies, longings and ideals remain much the same. In a sense, therefore, the book forms a ready reference, as it were, for the manners of people down the ages, almost a different kind of history textbook. It would, of course, have been of greater use, especially in this context, if Jai had specified the source or at least the period of each *subhāṣita*. What he has done is to mention in the Introduction that selections have been made from the Upanishads, epics, and other Hindu scriptures.

Having a selection strung together at one place not only gives an idea about the continuity of the human condition but also makes it possible for us to return to these gems of speech whenever necessary. Indeed, it would be better even to initially savour the book by reading a page per day, or perhaps a section at a time, as it is not possible to assimilate all of it in one reading. Neither is it the kind of book that would be interesting to read at one sitting. Since the book has the dual purpose of being both educative (and that again in three areas, literature, ethos, and language) and entertaining, it would be a good idea to take it in part by part. The idea of supplying the transliteration of the verse and of the Sanskrit paraphrasing is indeed very helpful and serves the author's purpose 'of a bridge to cross over from the Sanskrit to the English translation.' It makes for a better acquaintance with Sanskrit itself by enabling one to go back to the verse again after reading the meaning and the paraphrase, thereby awakening an understanding of new words by their context.

The author's purpose of bringing out the beauty of these *subhāṣitas*, of emphasizing the concept of a 'dharmic life' and of whetting the 'appetite and desire to make a systematic study of Sanskrit' are all amply fulfilled by the book. Indeed it is a good handbook for Indians in India and abroad as well as for westerners to get a significant peep into Indian heritage and culture. The book is neatly produced with no typographical errors. Only the price puts it surely out of reach of the lay person. Perhaps a paperback edition would serve the purpose.

Dr Sarada
Editor, The Ramana Way
Bangalore

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SPECIAL REVIEW

THE METHOD OF THE VEDANTA: A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF THE ADVAITA TRADITION: By Swami Satchidanandendra Saraswati. Translated by A.J. Alston. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110007. Pp. 975. Rs.950.

It was a great pleasure to go through this excellent book. It was first published by Kegan Paul, London in 1989, and the Indian edition came out only in 1997. The Indian publishers have done a great service to Indian philosophical thought and tradition by making it available to Indian scholars.

The book is a translation of Swami Satchidanandendra Saraswati's Sanskrit original *Vedānta Prakriyā Pratyabhijñā*, which was published sometime in 1964 as mentioned in the author's Introduction. The English version is a voluminous work of 975 pages. Though I have not seen the original, the book under review does not appear like a translation at all. The translator, a Sanskrit scholar and a student of Indian philosophy, was associated with Dr S. Radhakrishnan.

The book is a very fine analytical survey as well as a comparative study of (a) pre-Śaṅkara Vedānta including Bhartṛprapañca, (b) Śaṅkara's Advaita, (c) post-Śaṅkara schools and sub-schools of Advaita, and (d) Bhāskara. The author has considered Bhartṛprapañca's *ābheda-vāda* to point out how such a position is self-defeating. He has criticized Bhāskara, a junior contemporary of Śaṅkara, for the same reasons and also for condemning Śaṅkara as advocating the *māyā* doctrine of the Mahāyāna Buddhists.

The author has given a very lucid and faithful account of the Advaita of Śaṅkara. He is a devotee of Śaṅkara, to whom he refers as Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda, the Revered Commentator, and also of Gauḍapāda, who is referred to *ad nauseam* as the 'true expert' of Vedānta. He describes himself as a 'bhikṣu, whose support is the remembrance of Śrī Śaṅkara's holy feet.'

The author has, during the course of his analysis, considered (a) Maṇḍana's *Brahma-siddhi*, (b) Sureśvara's *Naṣkarmya-siddhi* and *Vārtika*, (c) Padmapāda's *Pañca-pādikā*, (d) Vācaspati's *Bhāmatī*, (e) Vimuktātman's *Iṣṭa-siddhi*, (f) Prakāśātman's *Vivaraṇa*, (g) Ānandabodha's *Nyāya-makaranda*, (h) Śrī Harṣa's *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya*, (i) Citsukha's *Tattva-pradīpikā*, and (j) Sarvajñātman's *Samkṣepa-sārīraka*. Thus, one can see that the sweep is very great and the canvas is very big.

The author raises the question regarding the true method of Vedānta. And according to him, it has traditionally been *adhyāropa* and *apavāda*, that is, 'that which cannot be expressed is expressed through false attribution and subsequent recanta-

tion.' Śaṅkara quotes tradition in his *Gītā-bhāṣya* (13.13): '*Adhyāropāpavādābhyām niṣprapañcam prapañcate*.' This was the method followed by Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara in their works on Advaita Vedānta.

According to the author, Śaṅkarites from Maṇḍana to Sarvajñātman have not been in a position to understand their master's philosophy. Really speaking, Maṇḍana, Sureśvara and Padmapāda were the direct disciples of the Ācārya. The other post-Śaṅkara Advaitins have interpreted Advaita either by following *Brahma-siddhi*, *Iṣṭa-siddhi* or *Pañca-pādikā*. Authors like Vācaspati Miśra, in their attempt to interpret Śaṅkara, have tread an independent path, under the spacious plea of explaining their master. *Bhāmatī* influenced later scholars very much. And the compulsion of their times drove others like Śrī Harṣa to indulge in dialectic and hypothetical reasoning, and they were more busy refuting their opponents. They believed that such refutation amounted to explanation of Advaita philosophy. The author writes: 'Relying on empty hypothetical reason the Vedantins became devotees of the art of debating for victory at any cost; they reached a state where they could not remember the true method of Vedānta even in a dream' (p. 917).

All these post-Śaṅkara Advaitins differ from Śaṅkara and differ from one another in important philosophical matters.

What is the nature of ignorance? Is it negative—mere absence of knowledge, or positive? How many ignorances are there? How is empirical ignorance different from metaphysical ignorance? Is ignorance the same as *māyā*? Are *māyā* and *avidyā* different or synonymous? What is the seat of *māyā*—Brahman or the individual soul? Does ignorance disappear simultaneously with the rise of Brahman-knowledge? Does ignorance in some subtle form continue even after one attains *jīvan-mukti*? What is the true method of Vedānta? What is the status of the liberated? What is meant by saying that the world is an illusion? What is it that is superimposed—an idea, attribute, notion, or a thing other than what is presented? What is *adhyāsa*? Is the world an effect of *māyā*? Is *māyā* same as *prakṛti*? Is *māyā* the material cause, or Brahman?

On these and various other matters post-Śaṅkara Advaitins are shown to differ from Śaṅkara and from one another. Thus there is not

one school of Advaita but as many schools and sub-schools as there were teachers. The author in his exasperation exclaims: 'In spite of all this, modern Vedāntins insist on claiming that the system of Śaṅkara is fundamentally the same as that of Vi-varaṇa. Whenever any difference between the two systems is too obvious to be altogether denied, scholars exercise all their ingenuity in reducing them to unity with every kind of foolhardy argument' (p. 856). These remarks are true of all the post-Śaṅkara Advaitins, and I agree with the author in his assessment of them.

According to me even the great Śaṅkara differed from Gauḍapāda. What was advocated by Gauḍapāda, he explained; what was suggested by Gauḍapāda, he expanded; in so doing, he differed in important aspects from Gauḍapāda. He diluted Gauḍapāda's extreme form of non-dualism. Sureśvara too differed from his master, though the author has played down these differences between Śaṅkara and Sureśvara. I had remarked about these deviations in the Preface to my book *The Advaita of Śaṅkara* some years ago.

Śaṅkara's philosophy did not go unchallenged. I have already referred to Bhāskara's remarks about *māyā-vāda* above. Rāmānuja and Madhva, and their followers, came down very heavily on Advaita. Hence post-Śaṅkara Advaitins had a twofold task before them: (a) polemical, and (b) constructive. Again, the post-Śaṅkara Advaitins were great thinkers in their own right. They were not mere record-players or their master's voice. They tried to explain their master's teachings to their generation, at the same time meeting the onslaught of rival schools. Further, they came from different religio-philosophical backgrounds where their perception of their master and Vedānta differed from the rigidity of tradition. They, therefore, gave a more rational, and at the same time traditional, Vedānta for their times. In the process they differed from the original Advaita of Śaṅkara and yet paid a verbal tribute to him and adhered to his philosophy. The author himself writes: 'The idea arose amongst Vedāntins, that though the various different schools of explanation all contradict one another, still they can be reconciled one way or another easily enough' (p. 916). He concludes his book with these remarks about Sarvajñātman: 'These topics are handled in a highly original manner peculiar to the author [Sarvajñātman]. Though he occasionally expresses his argument with earlier teachers, they are passed off, however, as the teachings of the Brahma-Sūtras, and as if they were in agreement with the revered commentator's explanation of that work' (p. 943, reviewer's italics). It seems the author has not taken a more rational approach to Śaṅkara. He should have raised questions like: Was Śaṅkara himself faithful to the philosophy of

the *prasthānas*? Is his method really the method of Vedānta? Are all Śaṅkara's doctrines truly Upaniṣadic? Is there no other method? Has not Śaṅkara also twisted *śruti* statements? What is the position of Gauḍapāda as a Vedāntin? Was he under the impact of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy—specially Vijñānavāda, the Mādhyamika Sūnyavāda, and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*? How to account for the similarity of these schools with that of Gauḍapāda? Has not Gauḍapāda been charged of borrowing from these schools?

There is an unproved assumption that the scriptures first give a false picture of Reality (which according to them is unspeakable) and later correct it by contradictory statements, for the simple reason that one is not capable of receiving the truth directly. It is this assumption which has led the Advaitins to believe that *adhyāropa-apavāda* is the method of Vedānta.

This does not seem to be very correct. For Śaṅkara while commenting on the *Gītā* (13.13) writes: '*Tathāhi sampradāyavidāṁ vacanam. adhyāropāpavādābhyāṁ niṣprapañcam prapañcate.*' Who are these *sampradāya-vidas*? Gauḍapāda? or the early Buddhists, viz the *Laṅkāvatāra*? The *Laṅkāvatāra* writes: '*Sarvadharmāḥ sadasatpakṣavigatāḥ samāropāpavādaiḥcā bālaiḥ vikalpyante na tu āryaiḥ.*' In this statement, there are suggestions of three Advaita doctrines: (a) *sadasadvilakṣaṇa*, (b) *adhyāropa* (*samāropa*) and *apavāda*, (c) *vikalpa* (*vikalpo na hi vastuḥ*). Thus *adhyāropa-apavāda* is the method of the idealist Buddhist and not of Advaita Vedānta. Again the doctrine of *vivarta* was anticipated and advocated by the brahmin Bhartṛhari in his *Vākyapadīya*. It is *śabda-vivarta-vāda*. Further, from the last part of the very first sentence of his *Brahma Sūtra-bhāṣya*—'*satyānrte mithunīkṛtya ahamidaṁ mamedam iti naisargiko'yaṁ lokavyavahārah*'—Dasgupta rightly remarks that Śaṅkara takes the world's unreality for granted and does not prove it. *Loka-vyavahāra* can also take place by one really identifying with the other real, which is totally different from it. The Self is a conscious entity. The body is unconscious and insentient. Due to constant conjunction and continued coexistence, the Self which is different from the non-Self (which is also real) identifies with it and thus we have the notion 'This is my body' or 'I am the body.' In fact, modern Advaita scholars feel that Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭadvaita is more true to the philosophy of the *prasthānas* than the Advaita of Śaṅkara.

The author states that he could not find any other method of Vedānta in his study of the *Brahma Sūtras*. I am very much doubtful of the correctness of this statement. In fact, *sūtra* 1.1.4 gives the method, viz *samanvaya*. '*Tat tu samanvayāt*,' that is, on the basis of proper exegesis of the scriptures,

jijñāsyā Brahman, as the supreme source of this world and the cause of its sustenance and dissolution, is to be established.

This proper explanation of the scriptures (*samyak + anvaya = samanvaya*) is done with the help of the principles of interpretation laid down in the *Mīmāṃsā*, including the marks which determine the purport of the texts (*tātparyaliṅgāḥ*) such as *upakrama*, *upasaṁhāra*, *abhyāsa*, *apūrvatā*, *phala*, *arthavāda* and *upapatti*. When the purport of the scriptures is faultlessly established through the help of the *tātparyaliṅgas* we come to know that Brahman is the author (*jagat-kāraṇa*) etc, through the scriptures.

In addition, we have other *tātparyaliṅgas* of the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* school. They are *śruti*, *liṅga*, *samākhya*, *vākya*, *prakaraṇa* and *sthāna*. Among the above, the first two are stated to assist the entire Vedic literature to convey Brahman primarily. Through mere *rūḍhi* or *yoga* and other functions, the same word can also mean worldly objects. Thus the *śrutis* in their entirety convey Brahman through *mahārūḍhi* or 'great convention', known only to the learned, and *mahāyoga* or 'great etymological function', through which a characteristic when conveyed will be known as being in Brahman in all its perfection. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* says: 'They propound Me only by *vidvad-rūḍhi* and *mahāyoga-vṛtti*.'

Words and phrases occurring in the *śāstras* are of four kinds. They are: (a) *anyatraiva prasiddha*, (b) *anyatra prasiddha*, (c) *ubhayatra prasiddha*, and (d) *atraiva prasiddha*. The *samanvaya* of these in Brahman is dealt with in various sections of the four chapters of the *Brahma Sūtras*.

Chapter 2 of the *Brahma Sūtras* is rightly named 'Avirodha Adhyāya', the chapter establishing the non-contradictability of the thesis of *samanvaya*. There are four possible oppositions anticipated by the commentator (Śaṅkara). They are: (a) *yukti*, (b)

samaya, (c) *śruti-śruti virodha*, and lastly (d) *yukti-yukta śruti virodha*. The last two are the most important. The commentator has clearly indicated how to overcome these *virodhas* without resorting to the *adhyāropa-apavāda* method.

Hence the method of Vedānta does not appear to be *adhyāropa* and *apavāda*, as pleaded by the author; *Mīmāṃsā śāstra*, *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* and the various methods of determining the meaning of the *śrutis*, and *samanvaya* seem to be the methods of Vedānta. If the Advaita school has adopted the *adhyāropa-apavāda* method, it has only borrowed it from the Buddhist idealists.

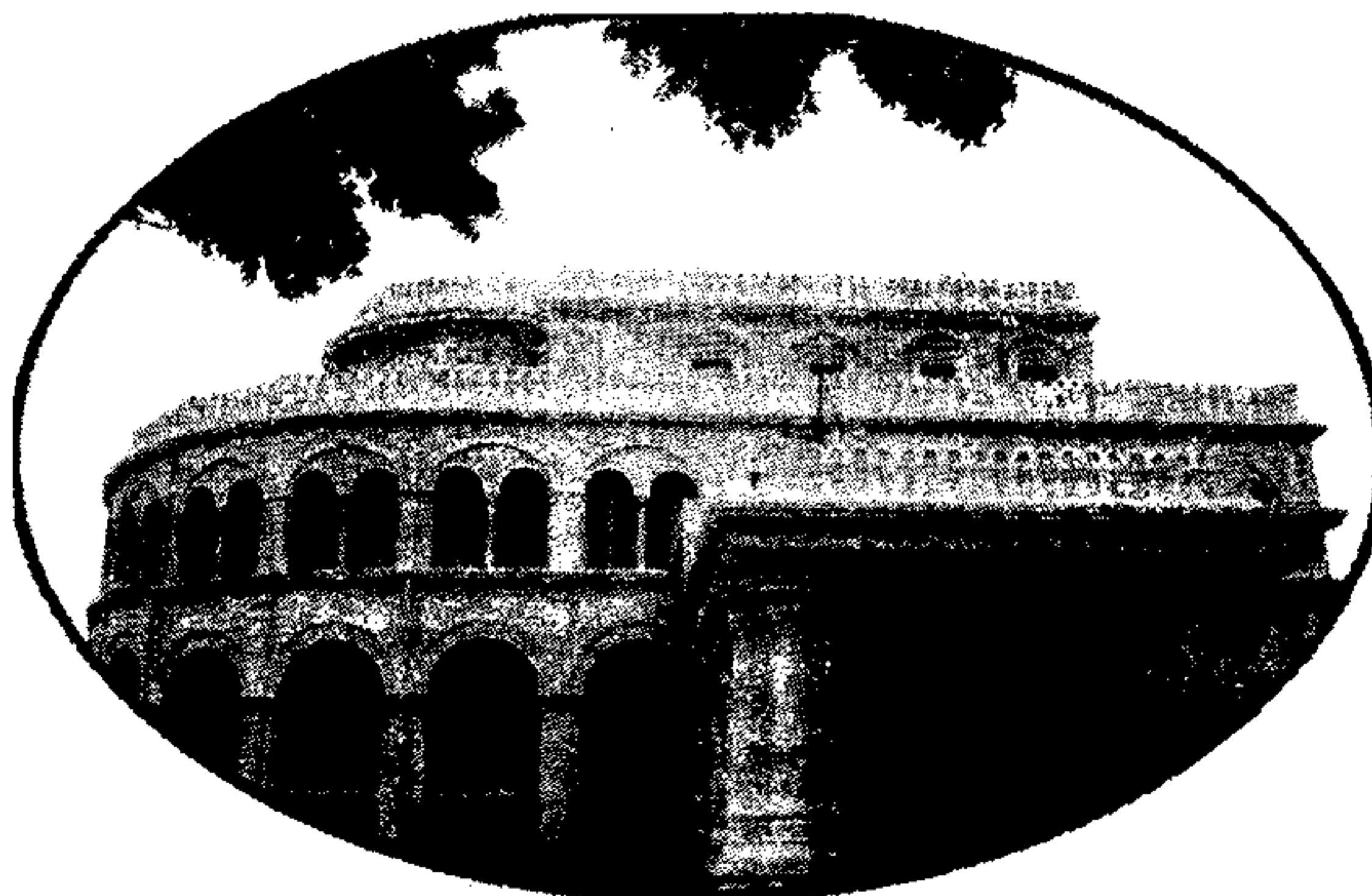
This apart, the book on the whole is a remarkable work on Advaita Vedānta. It has undertaken a very honest and faithful survey of the pre-Śaṅkara and post-Śaṅkara schools of Advaita and has boldly pointed out where the latter have differed from him. Its evaluation of these thinkers is apt.

I therefore commend the book to all scholars of Vedānta. It will definitely add to their knowledge and make them think anew. It is a very good contribution, in recent days, to the literature on Vedānta in particular and orthodox Indian philosophy in general.

However, the book is bulky—975 pages printed in very small type, which taxes the reader's eyes. It is therefore suggested that later editions of the book be printed in bigger, readable type and be divided into two volumes. In view of the invaluable nature of the work, the cost of the book cannot be said to be prohibitive. Messrs Motilal Banarsidass have brought out the book wonderfully well.

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Vivekanandar Illam (see facing page for story)

News and Reports

Inauguration of the VIVEKANANDA CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA EXHIBITION at VIVEKANANDAR ILLAM — a historical monument

Vivekanandar Illam (or 'Vivekananda House') on the Marina, is a 158-year-old Chennai landmark which has an interesting history. It was originally built in 1842 by Frederic Tudor, the 'Ice King', to store ice—which gave the building its popular name, 'Ice House'. Sometime around 1880, when Tudor's business collapsed, the Ice House was sold to Biligiri Iyengar, an advocate of the Madras High Court and a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Iyengar remodelled the structure and called it 'Castle Kernan' after his friend, the famous Justice Kernan of the Madras High Court. Apart from being Iyengar's residential quarters, the building also served as a shelter for poor students.

When Swami Vivekananda returned to India in February 1897 after his successful mission in the West, he was given a rousing reception in Madras. Biligiri Iyengar offered Castle Kernan to his Master, and the great Swamiji spent nine days in his disciple's house, from 6 to 14 February 1897. During these nine days he delivered seven inspiring lectures on India and her glory.

Swami Ramakrishnananda, who arrived in Madras at Swamiji's behest in March 1897, established a shrine for Sri Ramakrishna at Castle Kernan. He continued to work there till 1906, even after Biligiri Iyengar's demise in 1902. The property was auctioned off in 1906.

In 1917 the building passed into the hands of the government, which used it as a students' hostel till 1993.

In 1963, when Swami Vivekananda's birth centenary was being celebrated all over India, the Tamil Nadu government named the Ice House 'Vivekanandar Illam', and the Ramakrishna Math also began its efforts to acquire the building in order to maintain it as a national monument. The Math's patience paid off when, after a long wait, the government announced on 6 February 1997, that it would hand over the Illam to Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, on lease to set up a permanent exhibition on Swami Vivekananda and the cultural heritage of India. The year 1997 is special because it marks the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's 'homecoming'.

After coming into the hands of the Ramakrishna Math, Vivekanandar Illam has undergone thorough restoration work executed by a panel of

carefully picked experts. In addition to the permanent exhibition, the Illam proposes to house an education centre devoted to the study of Indian culture and Swami Vivekananda's philosophy.



Swami Gautamanandaji, Sri K. Anbazhagan, Sri M. Karunanidhi, Swami Smarananandaji, Sri A.N. Veerasamy and Swami Jnanadanandaji at the inaugural function

The first phase of the painting section on Floor 1 ('India from Vedic Times till the Advent of Sri Ramakrishna') and the photo gallery on the Veranda of Floor 2 (consisting of photos of Swami Vivekananda and other relevant photos specially donated by the Vedanta Society of St Louis) were inaugurated on 20 December 1999 at 10.15 am by Sri M. Karunanidhi, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The public meeting that followed was attended by over 1000 devotees, admirers and distinguished guests. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Sri Karunanidhi, Swami Gautamanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, Prof K. Anbazhagan, Minister of Education, Sri A.N. Veerasamy, Minister of Health and Electricity and Sri Duraimurugan, Minister of Public Works, addressed the gathering. A booklet on the teachings of Swami Vivekananda in Tamil by Prof Anbazhagan was also released, and the artists and other persons involved in the renovation of the Illam and the organization of the exhibition were honoured with mementoes.